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MAN'S MIRACLE

MAN'S MIRACLE

THE STORY OF HELEN KELLER AND HER EUROPEAN SISTERS FROM THE FRENCH OF GERARD HARRY

WITH A FOREWORD BY
GEORGETTE LEBLANC-MAETERLINCK

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK:
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1913

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PREFACE

Letter from Madame Georgette Leblanc-Maeterlinck to Monsieur Gérard Harry.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You are doing a noble work by presenting the public with a new aspect of Helen Keller, the American blind and deaf mute.

I know your generous enthusiasm for this mysterious heroine, and how conscientiously you have worked at collecting the necessary information, and I feel assured that your book will deal with every aspect of this wonderful problem and the vital questions which it raises.

It seems great presumption on my part to send you even these few lines, and I should not have ventured to reply to your friendly request had not circumstances enabled me to mark your work with this seal, "I have seen Helen Keller." In her presence, my pity for her fled, ashamed—I went to Wrentham filled with distress and sadness, and I found, instead of an object for compassion, a queen of a great and beautiful kingdom. There was no need to wait for a friendship to grow between us; an instinctive mutual sympathy sprang up at once, and I shed tears of admiration as I pierced the darkness that hides from our eyes the glories of the soul within.

I felt bewildered at first, at this light amid the darkness: as her soft fingers gathered the words from my lips, my mind seemed to lose its way, and I was conscious that in the apparent tomb of death, a life

existed, more brilliant, more intense and beautiful than most of those we see round us.

However, I will not burden the opening of your book with personal memories, which I hope, moreover, to relate another day.

My chief impression is this—Helen's personality is so great, her mind is so well-balanced, so strong and sane, her intelligence so fine, that the problem is reversed. We need desire no longer to be understood, we must try to understand. We must learn to read and know the enigma she presents to us, and we chafe at the moral blindness which keeps us from realizing human conditions so different from our own. Helen may have been afflicted almost from birth, yet, by her courage and strength, she has become a different creature.

Her life, indeed, seems to me a great lesson and it has been passed in a world so full of mystery that we may well call it an abnormal one.

Helen has created for herself her relations with the universe: she has adapted herself to it, and to the circumstances of her life, in her own way. She has only travelled through a very small space of interior light and yet she seems to be the result of a century of patience.

Unwearying as nature, as the drop of water hollowing the rock, as the ivy that covers the ruins with eternal spring, her life is a symbol of the labour of humanity, scaling the barriers of ignorance, as it travels onward towards the light.

Georgette Leblanc Maeterlinck

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CHAPTER I

The Metamorphosis of Helen Keller
Her Origin

THE OMNISCIENCE OF A BLIND AND DEAF MUTE. THE PROBLEMS SHE PRESENTS. THE WAYS AND METHODS OF THE MIRACLE. THE RELATIVE VALUE OF THE SENSES IN ABNORMAL AND NORMAL PERSONS. THE CONCEPTION OF DISTANCE, OF SOUNDS, OF RHYTHM, OF DANCING, OF COLOUR, OF PLASTIC ART IN A GIRL DEPRIVED OF SIGHT, HEARING, AND SPEECH.

As I write the first lines of this book, I feel that many volumes might be filled in exhausting its vital and intensely interesting subject. The case of Helen Keller, the blind, deaf and dumb American girl, who has attained to the highest degree of understanding and culture, is a subject containing a thousand different points of interest to the imagination, and the interest is increased and the horizon widened, as I propose to consider not only her case, but also others of the same nature, and of equal interest.

Mark Twain, the great humourist, who between two jests, often made true and serious state-

ments, said one day: "The nineteenth century has produced two exceptional individuals—Napoleon and Helen Keller." An English traveller, Mr. J. Hodder Williams, wrote: "The United States possesses two of the world's wonders — Helen Keller and the Falls of Niagara." But neither of these writers has attempted to penetrate into the mysteries of this transformation of a miserable fraction of humanity (a hundred times more imperfect than Victor Hugo's fantastic Quasimodo) into a well-educated woman, graduate of a university, who has gained a thorough knowledge of algebra and mathematics, and an acquaintance with astronomy, Latin and Greek; who is able to read Molière and Anatole France, and express herself in their language—and has mastered Gœthe, Schiller and Heine in German, and Shakespeare, Kipling and Wells in English. She writes on philosophy, psychology and poetry—she visits museums, exhibitions and theatres, carrying away from them impressions almost as vivid as yours or mine, and also (no doubt with a further capability in the future) is able to take part in various games and amusements, as she can draw, speak on her fingers, sew,

embroider, row, ride on horseback, ride a tandem bicycle, play chess and cards, and shows in thought and conversation a greater intelligence on the general questions of life, than three-quarters of the normal men and women we meet.

One might well have told this wonderful story of her regeneration in the form of a fairy tale after the manner of Perrault: "There was once upon a time a little girl enclosed in profound darkness, more isolated from the world than the smallest insect, for she could neither hear, nor speak, nor see, and by some miracle she came to see, to hear and to speak, to understand, to feel, to think, as well as the most perfectly educated people in the world." But, Helen Keller, now thirty-two years of age, has written this fairy story herself, in two books, which have been translated, and are well-known in France, and these productions are in themselves sufficient proofs of the degree to which natural incapacity and ignorance have been overcome by training. This phenomenon has so far only been regarded as a sensational marvel, but it should interest us not merely from this point of view. Reduced to the proportions of an exceptional accident, it would

deserve no more attention than an earthquake, considered apart from its primary cause, or its final consequences.

What I propose, is to indicate the multitude of ideas, hopes, conjectures and doubts — suggested by this new Helen, as beautiful mentally, as was she of the Iliad in outward appearance. It is a story containing, perhaps, the solution of many enigmas, unguessed until now, and the answer to some of those questions asked in all time, beginning with this one: "What is the limit of human perfection, and up to what point may our will correct and overcome hostile nature?"

Before entering this wilderness of speculation, it would be advisable to describe the methods which rescued Helen Keller from impenetrable darkness, and we will therefore consult her personal narrative and the complementary notes of her teacher, Miss Anna Sullivan.

Our heroine came of a Swiss family, which had emigrated two centuries before to the United States. She was born in June, 1880, in an idyllic cottage at Tuscumbia, a tiny town in the State of Alabama. One of her ancestors was a teacher of the deaf and

dumb at Zurich, a coincidence which she notices herself, adding: "It is true that there is hardly a king who has not numbered a slave amongst his ancestors, or a slave who has not descended from some king." One of her great grandparents was aide-de-camp to La Fayette during that great general's service in the American War of Independence. She was born of the second marriage of a rich and intelligent country gentleman, with a woman much younger than himself, but of an equal social position, and the child seemed exempt, at her birth, from any of those hereditary taints, which explain, according to modern science, so much that is abnormal. At nineteen months, she was a perfectly sound, healthy baby. Then came a sudden and terrible accident. She was attacked by a cerebral and stomachic congestion, and some weeks later she recovered bodily health, but was left, as if by the hands of an executioner, deprived of sight, hearing and speech; a creature inferior to the lowest and most helpless animal.

At this point a problem arises, which I shall briefly note at the moment, returning to it later. "Are the intelligence, consciousness and faculty of affec-

tion already formed in a child of nineteen months? During this short period of normal existence, had little Helen's memory been indelibly impressed with the apprehension of light, with the sounds which in her baby fashion she had tried to imitate, with the attitudes and gestures of the persons who had passed before her eyes?" Whether the answers to these questions are in the affirmative or negative, they open up wonderful and interesting points of view for conjecture on the origin and organisation of the human race. Let us first consult Helen Keller herself. She naturally asked herself this question before any other—Whether any ray of understanding had penetrated her mind before she was enveloped in that great darkness and silence? She appealed also to her parents' memories, but her enquiry resulted only in suppositions, contradictions, misgivings. She expresses truthfully her own doubts on the subject. "When I try to remember my first impressions, I see reality and fiction are confused in the uncertainty separating the past from the present. One is apt to describe one's former sensations by means of one's present imagination." She writes that up to the age of seven she had no "soul," that she existed auto-

matically without consciousness of her "ego"—without aim, thought, will, hope, desire, faith, or law, without a suspicion of the past or the future—in a kind of chaos which defies all description, and which Descartes would no doubt have qualified as complete nullity by the test of his criterion: "I think, therefore, I am." At another time, however, she suggests that her illness may not have destroyed all the developments of her early existence.

The brief glimpse she had had of light and space, filled with movement and sound, was not altogether eclipsed. She must have felt the presence of other beings coming and going between the obstacles surrounding her, as she would cling constantly to her mother's skirts for safety. Her sense of smell guided her amongst the flowers in the garden, and awoke in her some vague memory of form and colour. By her sense of touch, she soon learnt to fold and arrange clean linen, and to distinguish her own, while her lips tried to articulate, as before the catastrophe, the syllable *wa* (the first of water), and when she was hungry, she would make the gesture of cutting bread into slices and spreading them with butter—possible survivals of a period of sight and observation. She

hesitates, however, to vouch for the accuracy of her retrospection. Perhaps, the truth lies halfway between her conception of the fact, and its actual existence. No doubt she had a confused memory of a former and better condition, with the distinctive desire to reconquer it, for she would grope desperately through the darkness and emptiness, searching for something, touching the moving lips of her father and mother, learning, or remembering, that they communicated their ideas by other means than signs; trying to utter sounds, and beating the air with frantic movements of fist and foot in her revolt against her helplessness, just as a miner, entombed by an accident, strikes here, there, and anywhere with his pickaxe, hoping that some sound may penetrate to one who will save him from his misery.

It was this manifestation of the rebellion of Helen Keller against her affliction which decided her fate. Her parents dared not hope anything for this little living corpse. They only saw in her revolt, the exuberance of the wild plant, or the impulses of the animal. Their tenderness for her was manifested in ministering to her physical needs, and out of pity they abstained from thwarting the capri-

cious desires of this poor little animal, born of their flesh for their affliction and hers. Perhaps Mrs. Keller remembered having read of a visit made in 1842 by Charles Dickens to the Blind Institute at Boston, when the popular English author was astonished by the results of an educational experiment, of Dr. Samuel Howe, on the deaf, dumb, and blind girl, Laura Bridgman (1) But even if Laura still lived, Dr. Howe had been dead for some time, taking with him the secret of his miracle. The incredulity of Helen's father made him regard the renewing of destroyed senses as a Utopian impossibility, while his affection for her made him dread the separation necessary for such an experiment. But Helen's instinctive and determined aspiration towards the light, shown by her attacks of rage and revolt, decided the doubts, the agony, and the scepticism of her parents. She was six years old when they consulted an eminent oculist at Baltimore, who pronounced her blindness incurable, but advised a visit to the great physician and expert in acoustics, Graham Bell, who was a reputed specialist for deaf mutes, as well as being the

(1) The description of this visit occurs in a panegyric on the United States, called "American Notes," an apology in some measure for his violently satirical novel, *Martin Chuzzlewit.*

inventor of the telephone and photophone. Graham Bell strongly advised the Kellers to go to the Perkins' Institute at Boston, where the system of Dr. Samuel Howe, the instructor of Laura Bridgman, was continued according to his tradition; there they would, perhaps, find a wonder-worker to save Helen from her misery. A few months later there arrived at Tuscumbia, Miss Anna Sullivan, the young woman who was to renew and surpass Dr. Howe's achievement. She had herself been a witness of his system, having lived at the Institute with Laura Bridgman, first, as a patient for a temporary affection of her eyes, and on her recovery, as a teacher of the blind.

One cannot think, without a shudder, of the gigantic nature of the task set before this missionary of twenty-one years. It was in truth a superhuman one, that of creating a world out of the chaos where lay the sad vestige of humanity called Helen Keller. One's imagination goes back to the Creation, described in Genesis, where everything was formed out of nothing—*omnia ex nihilo.*

Miss Sullivan set to work with tranquil courage, as soon as she saw the poor victim, who little knew that she had met her Providence.

She recognised at once that the wounded and ferocious animal in Helen must first be overcome, before the good angel could be awakened.

So far, only her bodily strength had been developed, combined with a blind and violent self-will, encouraged by her parents' pity and indulgence; and unless constrained by superior physical force, she rebelled against every lesson and duty. There was at first a succession of physical struggles, which left Miss Sullivan panting and exhausted, shaken by nervous tears, and depressed by uncertainty. But by degrees Helen submitted, and began to take pleasure in the game which her unknown friend played with her fingers on the palm of her hand—tracing such words as *Cake*, or *Doll*, and making her answer in turn. Thus, one of the two senses left to her (the senses of touch and smell) was employed in a manner whose ultimate utility she could not guess at, but which at the moment satisfied her ardent desire for action.

By means of touching a cake, or a doll, immediately after, or before, the tracing of the name on her hand, she arrived at divining a relation between these objects and their signs, and at learning to spell

in Miss Sullivan's hand, one or other of the substantives, each time that she wanted a sweetmeat, or a plaything. What a difference there is between this method of communication and the usual pantomime of deaf mutes! For a person afflicted with blindness, in addition to the lack of speech and hearing, obviously some other system was required, than that invented, or perfected, by the Abbè de l'Epée for deaf mutes, whose gestures could be emphasized and supplemented by facial expression. No doubt, before their education was attempted, Laura Bridgman, Helen Keller, and Marie Heurtin (the blind and deaf and dumb French girl, whom I shall mention later) had made use of those instinctive means of expression for the necessary demands of nature, such as are practised even by dumb animals. But with these triply afflicted children, this rudimentary form of language is merely a monologue, with no method of reply, and is extremely limited.

The stroke of genius in Miss Sullivan's system of education is the invention of a manual dialogue, which places the blind and deaf mute in complete correspondence with normal humanity. It is what a

bridge thrown across a river is to a man without a boat, and who cannot swim.

Dr. Samuel Howe was the first person to apply the principle of this discovery in the case of Laura Bridgman. He worked, however, at the beginning, in a slightly different manner from Miss Sullivan. He explained to his pupil the equivalence of objects and words by making her touch successively the objects, and cards bearing their names in relief (1). Helen Keller's teacher simplified the master's method in one way, by eliminating the intermediary figure of language, and complicated it in another, by extending rapidly and indefinitely the manual vocabulary she had invented, to the point of tracing in her pupil's hand entire phrases, without stopping to consider whether they were understood or not. I believe I am giving a true interpretation of her system by saying that it was founded on a boundless confidence in the power of resistance of mental faculties to the worst accidents of nature. She had

(1.) He describes how he tried to intensify Laura's deadened senses, and to arouse cerebral impressions by electricity and galvanism, but with only moderate success. A galvanic circle having been made by the pressure of metal on the mucous membrane of the nose and the tongue, affected nothing in her, but the sense of taste.

noticed, as have we all, that children, long before they learn the alphabet and grammar, understand the general meaning of a phrase, or a conversation, while they are quite incapable of pronouncing the words, or, still less, of analysing them in detail. The sense is understood by a habit of ear, or observation of facial expression, and also by the mysterious intuition they bring with them on first awakening to life. In the case of Helen Keller, the hand, after growing sensitive, would take the place of the eye and ear, and the throat and lips would in time reproduce the whole language, provided that the intuitive sense secreted in every human being from its cradle (and this, Miss Sullivan never doubted) had survived the terrible disaster to the principal senses. Acting on this conviction, Helen's teacher spoke directly to her hand, as fully as she would have spoken with her lips to normal children, with the firm belief that something would be understood, and one day, *every-thing*.

In the end this audacious faith was justified. But at what a cost—what efforts, what patience, what ingenuity were needed for its attainment! We admire the genius of men who tunnel through mountains, or

belts of land, for the passage of railways or ships. But this achievement was the searching for light through the opaque, measureless, darkness of the blind, deaf and dumb! We call those men heroes who work for days and nights in the rescue of some unfortunates entombed in a mine, straining their ears for some feeble response to their shouts for help, but what of this woman's constant watch through weeks, months, years, the tension of every nerve, the search through darkness for a hidden intelligence, an intelligence, perhaps, vanished for ever, but which, even if existing, was wandering vaguely in gloom and silence, far from laughter, from song, from tears, from every interpretation of life!

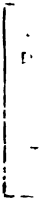
At the end of some months Helen had learnt about sixty words, corresponding to tangible objects. She had learnt them, however, as parrots, or performing dogs learn, without understanding their sense in the universal system of expression. To give an example of this beginning of her education. Suppose one were to put in the hand of a new-born child, ten, twenty, fifty grains of sand, would they give him the faintest conception of the desert, or of the Himalayas, of which they are atoms?

In order, therefore, that Helen's brain might make a decisive advance towards the light, she had now to be made to understand that the words she had learnt mechanically were only like the dust of a distant mountain, from whose summit she would see the world. She must be brought to say to herself (for by what possible means could it else be revealed to her?) "These words are only the fragments of a great language which defines all things, according to a general law, and this law, when I have learnt its secret, will put wings to my mind, by which I can fly from darkness, and reach the most dazzling light." Until this truth had sprung spontaneously from her mind, all the words she had accumulated were like so many pearls cast before swine. One day, this truth suddenly gushed forth, literally as well as figuratively, as the water from a fountain. All Miss Sullivan's efforts had failed to make her pupil understand the difference between a liquid and a cup, between the contents, and that which holds them. One morning she held Helen's hand under a fountain of water, at the same time writing on her palm the word *water*. She then placed in it a mug full of water, writing the word *mug*. Suddenly,

HELEN KELLER between Mme. GEORGETTE LEBLANC-MAETERLINCK and Mr. MACY, who married Miss SULLIVAN, the instructress of the celebrated blind deaf-mute.

. . . . . .

The bookshelves in the photograph contain works specially printed and published in raised type for HELEN KELLER'S use. These include many of the classics in Latin, French, German and English, which this blind and deaf girl has in every sense completely mastered and understood.



Helen went red and pale by turns, trembled, and seemed transported with delight, as the statue of Galatea suddenly animated by the love of Pygmalion, or as a blind man, who, by the stroke of some magic wand, sees all at once the sun and the blue sky.

The thick veil was rent. Eureka! Out of chaos a sudden light dazzled Helen's consciousness, and made clear to her that every word corresponds with some object; that in future she could ask for everything, obtain, listen, understand by an exchange of systematic signs with the unknown person near her. Half mad with joy, she began to touch everything, and ask the name of everything, beginning with that mysterious stranger, who answered by means of touch, "Teacher." Helen responded by the usual human expression, that is, by caresses and kisses, as if to say, "Now I know. You are my deliverer, come take me by the hand and lead me from prison." Miss Sullivan's heart was ready to burst with joy. She shed happy tears; tears worthy of being enshrined in a royal jewel case, for no diamonds from India, or Africa, are as precious as those drops, the fruit of such noble pride and such rare charity.

Thus Helen had the key which would open to her the doors of understanding—a relative understanding, it is true. She could know, in future, everything about the objects she could touch, but how should she be taught a conception of abstract things, or of sentiments, ideas, the chief factors, although invisible and impalpable, of all actions, and of all human history? This second stage of her education seemed checked by still more formidable obstacles than the first. When her teacher tried to make Helen understand the word "Love," she wanted to touch the object, and when she was told it was not an object she could touch, she asked if it was the scent of flowers, or the warmth of the sun.

Miss Sullivan says that when one day Helen seemed puzzled, she tried to give the child the idea of abstract things by writing on her forehead the word "think." She supposes that immediately the young girl's imagination grasped a connection between her mental state at the moment and the explanation that was given her, and that she represented to herself, from that time, the immaterial idea—thought—making use of that idea by a series of victorious efforts, to include by degrees everything that

cannot be touched. It is more probable that as soon as the mechanism of reflection was set loose by the revelation of the conventional link existing between concrete objects, and their corresponding words, Helen began of her own accord to define her own mental sensations, such as *tenderness, irritation, satisfaction, doubt, pride*, by analogies borrowed from physical things. In translating *love* by *perfume of flowers*, or *warmth of the sun*, she already showed an approximate intelligence of the feelings of admiration, pleasure, well-being, of which love is at once the factor, and the consequence. Later, extending her conception of love far beyond its reality, as the imagination of a blind person may enhance the beauty of a spectacle denied to him, she ingenuously wrote that "Love is that which we all feel for others." What is very striking, however, is that at the present time, when she is at the maturity of her knowledge and judgment, she makes use, in her literary compositions, of an extraordinary wealth of metaphor. For example, a whole chapter of "The World I live in" is devoted to reducing all her ideas to visible and tangible objects. They are presented in the form of personages, charming or grave, noble, frivolous, or grotesque, passing

before the eyes and disappearing in complete disorder, with no apparent effort for discipline or arrangement.

It is a most picturesque example of mental incoherence; a survival from a primitive society, thus repeating itself in an individual of incomplete organization. Helen possessed only a small vocabulary limited to the definition of natural objects. In expressing her developing emotions, and the things she began to be aware of in the spiritual world, she was forced to make use of material images, and to invent what are called figures of speech. Even at our own standard of civilization, orators and writers are wont to clothe and give bodily form to their abstract statements in order to make their meaning clear. How natural it is, therefore, that such methods should be employed by a being, whose means of communication with the world are exclusively limited to the sense of touch.

Helen Keller was now an intelligent human being, open to all knowledge to be gained through the language of touch. The rest of her education, after these long and painful years of initiation, followed as logically from its beginning, as the harvest follows the

sowing, or as the modern printing press completes the first invention of Caxton. It was now relatively easy to teach her the ordinary alphabet, to train her to read successively the school manuals, and afterwards the masterpieces of literature in Braille characters, some of which were already in existence for the use of the blind, while many others were printed in raised characters expressly for her use by Miss Sullivan's collaborators. Along with the explanations which her devouring curiosity obtained from her teacher, she drew from her reading an encyclopædic knowledge, and filled her mental vision, hitherto a blank, with a complete panorama of the world. It was only another step in advance, to learn languages, dead and living, to acquire ideas of science, in spite of deaf ears and blind eyes. If obstacles arose to stop her progress, they came from without, and she herself overcame them. Thus, objections were made to her competing for a degree at the University with those who had the normal use of their eyes. Since she could neither hear the questions of the examiners, nor answer orally, she would be obliged to make use of an intermediary in the person of Miss Sullivan or some other, who would communicate the question on

her hand, when she would reply in writing. The University authorities, fearing that this complicated process might lead to an unfair advantage, or at any rate to suspicion, hesitated before admitting her to the examination, but were in the end obliged to yield, at seeing the despair of a student so illtreated by fate, and so splendidly resolved to conquer it.

When this difficulty was over, Helen was stimulated to another ambition, viz., to become independent of an intermediary by assimilating the spoken word. She became more eager than ever to learn by her hand the mechanism of the vocal chords of others, and the movement of the lips in emitting sounds and phrases. The utility of this exercise for those who are only deaf and dumb has often been questioned. This question seems absurd, if we only consider two contingencies amongst a thousand others. A person thus afflicted might be lost in the dark, when passers-by would be quite unable to understand his signs—or, again, the cry of "Help! Fire!" might save him from a burning room. It is asserted, however, with more reason, that deaf mutes can scarcely be taught to talk intelligibly, as, up to the present time, all efforts have only resulted in very defective articulation on

one monotonous note, with false inflections, and an intonation very harsh and unpleasant to the ear. At the outset, any attempt on the part of Helen Keller seemed doomed to failure, deprived as she was by blindness, of the suggestive expression of faces, and the movement of the lips of those with whom she so desired to converse. Still, if complete victory has not yet rewarded her heroic efforts, it is not far off. Helen can speak, and her speech is quite distinct to those who live with her, and listen attentively. She has spoken in public, and has been understood by many, and no doubt she will find one day, a way of proving, like Demosthenes and his pebble, that the perseverance of an ardent will may finally overcome the worst physical defects. I am about to suggest what seems like a paradox, viz., that the wonderful acuteness of her sense of touch may eventually lead her to this victory. One of the reasons of the difficulty of phonetic language with these afflicted people is, that not hearing themselves speak, they cannot know the effect produced by their words, nor can they enforce their meaning by those modulations of tone which are natural to us. Now, Helen Keller has at the tips of her fingers, not only sharp eyes, but ears,

open to the faintest sound. To quote from her own expression, she is a veritable vibroscope, a faithful echo of the slightest vibration in the air, to the point of having acquired the sense of rhythm by the vibration in space, of sounds from the human throat, from an instrument of music, or from a tool. It was doubted whether she could catch the time of a waltz, or polka, but she has more than once dispelled these doubts by dancing in perfect time to an orchestra, by the vibrations in the air communicated to her fingers and the movements of her feet. Through the organ of touch, by means of which she could perceive the murmur of water, or the flutter of a bird's wings after a bath, of a plane or a saw, she has made discoveries yet unknown to acousticians, and reached results which were at first contested, so impossible did they seem. For example, a distinguished French writer, professor of the Faculty of Letters at Poitiers, M. Louis Arnould (author of the interesting biography of the blind and deaf mute, Marie Heurtin), suspected that Helen Keller had employed the help of a third person, when in describing a hunt, she declared that she was awakened by the "noise of the butt ends of guns" and "the heavy tramp of the huntsmen," and

also spoke of the "whinnying of the horses," and "the furious barking of dogs." These sensations, however, of which M. Arnould thought her incapable, would not have astonished Graham Bell, who was married to a deaf mute, nor Edison, a deaf man, both aware by experiment of the extreme sensibility of the vibrations of the ether, men whose researches led to the invention of the telephone and wireless telegraphy. The truth, attested by these expert witnesses, is that the most infinitesimal sound has its corresponding vibration in the ether; the nervous system, as it were, of space. Bring these vibrations into contact with a hand ceaselessly on the alert, with a hand, moreover, in which are collected and condensed almost all the human faculties; no wonder that they should be communicated to this hand as easily as a flutter of air to the ear of a woman fanning herself. Sceptics forget also that nature, as if in remorse for her own injustice, never weakens or deadens a sense without increasing in proportion the intensity of another, a fact proved by the extreme acuteness of the sense of hearing in the blind. The sense of touch in the normal person is far less acute than in a Helen Keller; it is distracted by a crowd of visual and auditive

impressions. We neglect in our wealth of sensations many treasures placed almost in our hands. (1)

Let us suppose that each of our four principal receptive faculties (2) corresponds to the value of 5—total 20. The cruel fate which only gave Helen two, touch and scent, doubled the power of those two, by the "law of organic equilibrium," suggested by Geoffroy Saint Hilaire, so that they represent 20. There is, therefore, between her and us only a difference of distribution. The material of our faculties is twice as extensive but twice as thin, the material of hers is twice as restricted but twice as thick. We disperse our faculties and our means of hearing—Helen Keller concentrates hers; and the natural acuteness with which her sensations seem to be provided, and which her infirmities have caused her to develop to the extreme limits of possibility, are sufficient explanation of her ability to perceive, without ears, the movement of leaves, or the humming of a bee, by means of the immense keyboard of space under her

(1) According to a picturesque expression of Helen Keller: "We keep our hands in our pockets."

(2) Except that of taste, and nothing in Helen Keller's history shows any difference of intensity between the sensations of her palate and ours.

exceptionally sensitive fingers. We may hope that she will arrive at assimilating by the same means the whole gamut of intonations in human speech. (1) One or two further statements of fact remain to be set down before the conclusion of this explanatory chapter. The biographer of Marie Heurtin, a man of faith of the school of St. Thomas, who believes, however, in a God Whom he has not seen, but Whom he pictures to himself, doubts the sincerity of certain passages in Helen Keller's books, where she describes a snowy landscape. He does not realise that by means of riding and walking, by journeys, by conversations with a cultivated teacher of an eloquence as great as her pupil's curiosity, Helen came to represent to herself lines, shapes, and aspects of places, as completely as if she had seen them with her eyes, just as we come to imagine quite easily, and even to describe graphically, countries which we have never visited. No doubt our eyes have helped us by points of likeness and terms of comparison. But in the young American the highly developed senses of touch and scent, placed equal aids at her disposi-

(1) In Chapter VI. of this book, the reader will find this prevision re-inforced, and be prepared for new marvels.

tion. For example, by the olfactory sense, that servant of the evening (for in the evening, in a rural district, the noises of the day subside, and the sense of touch has not so many offices to fulfil), Helen Keller learnt the ideas of distance and perspective. When she ceased to use her fingers, she perceived through her nose. From judging whether a certain scent was near or far off, she imagined a certain horizon composed of perfume or imperceptible vapours. By an analogy, the attributes of odours made her understand that the normal individual can be aware of objects without touching them, just as she became sensible of the presence of things and persons by the sole indication of her nostrils. It followed that her olfactory sense, twice as sensitive as ours, revealing subtle aromas of which we know nothing, and giving her delights undreamt of by us, was used by her as a measure is used by a surveyor, a compass by a sailor, a hound by a huntsman or a detective. Hence she calls smell "the fallen angel" of the senses, a sense so despised, neglected, and unjustly condemned by us for some of its sins, that we forget its many precious services. One domain seemed closed to her, that of colour. The proverb which declares it inex-

orably forbidden to the blind, has never been contradicted. Helen Keller, however, has entered it to a certain extent. She was taught the theory of the spectrum, and every object was presented to her with a description of its colour. Working, according to her rule, by analogy, she formed an idea of colours by thinking of a variety of scents and flavours. The difference between the scent of an orange and a bunch of grapes, or a peach, suggested to her the difference between black and white, red and green. Through this, she deduced the gradation of tones, the scale of shades, and she never thought of any object without instinctively clothing it with the chromatic elements of the rainbow. (1) Her brain had created, as it were, a painter's palette, where green was synonymous with freshness, red with strength and violence, white with truth and purity, and so on. Perhaps the colours of her imagination do not exactly correspond with truth. But does absolute truth exist even in the prism? We, who can see more clearly (but of whom many, without knowing it, are afflicted

(1) Laura Bridgman's biographer relates that she, who was intellectually very inferior to Helen, had a false idea of colours, for she declared one day that she wished she had pink eyes and blue hair.

with Daltonism) are not always agreed as to the nature of a colour. The proverb says: *De gustibus et coloribus non est disputandum;* and who knows whether Helen Keller's conjectures do not give an added beauty to the positive reflections of the iris?

Be that as it may, the reader is now fully acquainted with the marvellous progress made by this little blind, deaf, and dumb girl of Tuscumbia, through dark pathways to radiant light. A progress so wonderful as to be almost fantastic. The first time I was told of this miracle, I remembered a gruesome story which gave me, when I heard it, a perfect nightmare. The story is of a famous physician, who, in the pitiless curiosity of science, bribes some poor wretch on the pretext of giving him a painless death in exchange for the price of his corpse. He simply gives him an anæsthetic and removes the covering of the brain "to see what happens when the king of creation is reduced to a purely bestial state." Deprived of all reasoning power, the victim of this frightful experiment manifests an inordinate appetite and an irrepressible desire to exert by violence his strength, unnaturally increased by inaction and over-feeding. Bound and made helpless by the cruel scientist, the

man-animal finally bursts his chains, and crushes the physician to death, without even suspecting that he is destroying his torturer. We see, in Helen Keller's case, a metamorphosis in the contrary sense, the conversion of a little animal into an intellectual, sentient human being. Think of the condition of quadrupeds whose eyes reflect all that appears on their horizon, who have organs for observing, for shielding them from danger, who know when they are caressed, or ill-treated, whom we can lead, or domesticate, and whose slightest actions are governed by a certain instinct; let us lower our eyes to the tiniest insects that creep, they are also endowed with organs equally acute for seeing, for knowing what they do, what results will follow on the smallest contraction of their minute antennæ; and now compare this sum of animal capabilities with the condition of a little child, so afflicted that she can know nothing of time or its flight, of space and its divisions, of the sun, of other beings, or other things! Think of the little morsel of human flesh, enclosed in a sort of tomb, with just enough space to move in, and enough air to breathe—think of this wretched deformity which education has transformed into a highly cultured woman, endowed with

infinite sensibilities! Up to the present time, those who have not disbelieved in this prodigy have contented themselves with merely mentioning her in terms of admiration. The time has now come when we can learn from her case, lessons of life and counsels of wisdom, as we taste the juice of some rare fruit to discover its aroma and flavour.

CHAPTER II

The Course of the Torch

THE EARLY SOURCES OF THE MIRACLE. FROM GREEK DANCES TO THE LANGUAGE OF MIMICRY AND TOUCH. THE PATHWAY AND VIEW OF PROGRESS IN THE PAST AND THE FUTURE. THE CASE OF ALEXIS DECRAMER AT BRUGES. PRIESTS AND LAYMEN AS PERFORMERS OF MIRACLES. THE RESPECTIVE FUNCTIONS OF THE TWO SEXES IN THE REGENERATION OF THE TRIPLY AFFLICTED.

The first truth apparent from the case we have been considering is this: that every human effort, however individual or isolated it may have been, is the germ of a progress destined to become universal. No step in its advance was, or is, or will be useless. It clears a way for all the world to follow. A striking proof of this fact is afforded by tracing back to their sources the successive inventions which made possible the liberation of such victims as Laura Bridgman, Helen Keller, Marie Heurtin, and others. I have investigated these sources and found the following.

Long before the birth of Christ we note the creation of the dance with gesticulation, the chore-

graphic pantomime by the pagans of Athens and Rome. It was a purely æsthetic exhibition for the pleasure of the eye and the exercise of the imagination. In the middle ages there was still no suggestion of a useful or humanitarian application of such exercises. Afflicted persons, the ricketty, the crippled, the deformed, were allowed to die, or were even killed, being treated as incurable, or considered superstitiously, to be damned, but towards the end of the fifteenth century a light began to dawn. Erasmus advocated the possibility of helping the blind, by supplying the want of sight through the cultivation of the other senses. A century later, the Spanish Benedictine, Pedro de Ponce, who had seen the pantomimes of the ancient Græco-Latin civilisation imported across the Pyrenees, conceived the idea of a language by signs, which would furnish the deaf and dumb with a means of communication between themselves and society. The spectacle of a pagan amusement inspired a Catholic monk, after 1,500 years, to invent a rudimentary instrument of conversation for those who could neither speak nor hear. A fellow-countryman of the monk, M. Paul Bonet, wrote a book

to spread and make as popular as possible this discovery, which the Abbé de l'Epée perfected in the eighteenth century, and practically applied in the institute he founded for these unfortunate people, hitherto treated as pariahs, or parasites to be eliminated. He was followed by the humble French teacher, Valentin Haüy, who was profoundly touched by what he had seen at the Abbé de l'Epée's institute, and who set to work eagerly at the systematic and complete education of the blind by a combination of the Abbé's method with the new discovery of geographical maps and musical notation in relief.

It seems that in the eighteenth century—a century with a frivolous reputation, in spite of the life behind its artificiality—humanity (and France in the forefront) became aware of her powers of redemption, and of the extraordinary victories she was to gain eventually over nature. The very materialistic Abbé Condillac, tutor to the grandson of Louis XV., published his *Traité des Sensations,* and by means of his imaginary man-statue showed how persons reduced to the single sense of touch might come to share all the sensations of normal creatures. His statements at

first disgusted many of his contemporaries, as they seemed unorthodox ; others smiled at the apparently unreasonable paradox. But others again, began to think profoundly. Diderot, while allowing that blind and deaf mutes were condemned so far to perpetual imbecility, admitted the possibility of teaching them by means of a language of touch. And the Abbé de l'Epée enthusiastically asked for some child, deprived from the age of two or three, of sight, hearing, and speech, on whom to practise his new methods. His appeal was not responded to, owing to the want of publicity which to-day transports such a request in a few hours from one end of the world to another—and also owing to the lack of a subject. The cases of such triple mutilation were then as rare as medical science was imperfect, since the diseases which occasioned them, nearly always ended in death, no doubt before their symptoms were recognised as any other than those of ordinary fatal illness. Later, however, that is a century and a-half ago, the highest intellectual and philanthropic persons in Paris were filled with the ambition to undertake and succeed in this task. And we shall see by how straight and undeviating a way these successive suggestions, starting

from the first pre-Christian dance, pursued their journey through Spain and France to the new world, to culminate in the realization of the most audacious dreams.

In 1801, some time after the death of the Abbé de Condillac, of Diderot, of the Abbé de l'Epée, and a little while before that of Valentine Haüy, there was born in the United States, Samuel Howe, the future physician and founder of the Perkins Institute at Boston. As a young man, Howe was excited by the romantic accounts of Lord Byron's participation in the insurrection of Greece, and departed for Europe. He fought during ten years, first for the Greeks and then for the Poles, inspired, like them, by the love of liberty. During his adventures he met one of his compatriots, Dr. John Fisher, who had lately come from Paris, enthusiastic over the immense good done by the institutions of the Abbé de l'Epée for the deaf and dumb, and of Valentine Haüy for the blind. After exerting himself to the utmost for the Greek and Polish victims of oppression and conquest, Samuel Howe studied the French methods related by Dr. Fisher, in view of a crusade in the United States; this time to free the victims of despotic nature. He

brought with him to Boston the torch passed on by Pedro de Ponce, the Abbé de l'Epée, and de Haüy, and with the help of the munificent millionaire, Perkins, he founded the institute for the blind, where he improved still further the system initiated in Paris. However, the amelioration of the state of the blind was not sufficient for him. He ardently desired, after the example of the Abbé de l'Epée, to measure his strength against the triple and terrible obstacles of blindness, deafness, and dumbness, by combining the various methods applied to the blind.

He was told that a similar experiment in another American institute on an afflicted girl called Julia Brace, had failed, but instead of being discouraged, he seemed to draw from this defeat a new stimulus to energy. He heard from a medical report of a girl of seven years old at Hannover (in new Hampshire), Laura Bridgman, who could neither see, hear, nor speak ; after a severe attack of scarlatina, at the age of two and a half, she had even lost the sense of smell. He went to Hannover and took the child from her parents to Boston, where, by degrees, he made of her a woman less accomplished, it is true, than Helen Keller, but sufficiently remarkable,

allowing for her circumstances, to astonish everyone who saw her, (1) amongst others, men like Charles Dickens, the poet Longfellow, and the Hungarian patriot Kossuth.

Let us marvel at each link in the chain. It was at this same institute of Dr. Howe's that a young woman of the name of Anna Sullivan, suffering from accidental blindness, came to be cured. While recovering her sight, she witnessed the last phases of Laura Bridgman's evolution from the state of an animal to the dignity of a human being. She noted every detail and learnt every secret, and being told that there existed, at a farm in Alabama, another Laura Bridgman called Helen Keller, whose parents wished that her "resurrection" should take place at her home, she left the Institute Perkins, to fly to her rescue, taking with her Laura's last doll, which was to be the first doll, and, indeed, the first aid in the education of her little sister in distress, Helen Keller.

Helen's teacher, in a book she has written, denies

(1) About the same time in Belgium (1837-1838), the Institute for the Deaf and Dumb at Bruges, directed by the Abbé Carton, received a child of nine; deaf, dumb and almost blind, Anna Temmerman, who was taught to read, to write in Flemish, and to knit, which at that time was considered wonderful.

that she was inspired by any kind of enthusiasm. She says she was simply impelled by circumstances, which obliged her to earn her living. But the actual paths in which destiny leads us are of no consequence.

It seems as if a kind of logical fatality had traced this path, trodden through the centuries from the old Græco-Latin civilization to the young and budding civilization of the United States, by a gigantic idea. There is no shadow of doubt that the mind has its magnetic currents, and its roads leading as certainly to their goal, as the great roads opened by Cæsar's soldiers to his conquests, or the lines of steel by which in our modern age we transport ourselves and our belongings from one end of the world to the other.

The great and small telepathic roads we leave behind us are not the only roads the eye perceives. We catch glimpses of others, extending and multiplying into the future, we know not to what sublime end. The various efforts which have culminated in the re-creation of such beings as Laura Bridgman, Helen Keller and Marie Heurtin, were accomplished without any deviation or pause in their order, to their desired end. Thanks to the railway, the Morse code of telegraphy, to wireless telegraphy

(perhaps to-morrow to aviation), thanks also to a publicity, astounding in its rapidity, and to a feeling, hitherto unknown, of human solidarity, we find ourselves on the eve of an era of inter-communication and universal co-operation, where separate energies work together and mingle, attacking problems in a unified mass, with a thousand times more chance than hitherto, of solving them, and, moreover, of solving them in a space of time which seems, in comparison with the groping methods of past centuries, like a flash of lightning. Every new research, every discovery leading to ultimate good, or improvement, now and for the future, circulates almost instantaneously from mouth to mouth, from people to people, from hemisphere to hemisphere, exciting all the emulation and activity existing in competent intelligence, or passionate interest. In the human struggle against nature, a holy alliance of formidable discipline has been substituted for the guerilla warfare of primitive peoples. And since, in the past, no effort has been sterile, even if effected by some obscure wills operating almost in the dark, without any co-operation, and in spite of discouraging scepticism, or active opposition, what may we not expect from the gigantic united

movement of a society, knowing it can, and will, accomplish anything.

For Helen Keller's use, all the books of study and all the classics in dead and living languages which her insatiable thirst for knowledge demanded, have been copied, or printed in relief. She has placed this rare library, which cost thousands of dollars, at the disposition of others afflicted like herself, and she has become the life and soul of an official commission to perfect still further the system of teaching the disinherited. Her example and her efforts have inspired other Miss Sullivans for other Helen Kellers. As I have already said, she has reversed the funereal gloom of her own past, and analysed herself retrospectively, to benefit unhappy beings still waiting to emerge from what has been her own torture. She, who has come from the darkest night, holds the torch which had enlightened her on the way, for the use of others. These will again hold it aloft for the benefit of others to-morrow, and after to-morrow, and so on, until science, becoming bolder, will reach the root of the black evil, and make the return impossible. The answer has already been given to the first question raised by such a case as Helen Keller's.

There is no limit set to our perfectibility, since from such a human *zero*, such a sum of knowledge, emotion and vitality has been made.

* * *

In the appendix to this book, there will be found an unedited and quite recent document showing how apt is the epithet, *human zero*, applied to a blind and deaf mute. The document relates to a boy of fifteen, Alexis Decramer, a victim of this triple calamity, who for eight years has defeated the efforts made for his education by Canon Naeghels, Director of the Institute for the Deaf and Dumb and Blind at Bruges. These cases of triple infirmity are, for some unknown reason, more frequent in women than in men, and these latter, when so afflicted, are more rebellious (this is a fresh mystery to fathom) than the feminine element, towards efforts for awakening their dormant faculties. As will be seen in the appendix, Canon Naeghels has been unsuccessful during eight years of effort in drawing Alexis Decramer out of a state of almost complete brutishness. But, no doubt, time and perseverance and natural intuition will do more or less, sooner or later, what they have done

for Marie Heurtin, under difficulties as great in principle. In every case, all that has been realized is to be realized again, and everything is possible by education. Laura Bridgman, Marie Heurtin and Helen Keller are proofs of this.

Side by side with this truth is another, subsidiary and not less encouraging. There is also, no limit to our means, to our instruments of perfection. Here I am touching on a delicate point, where I run the risk of wounding some honest convictions. Those who hold these convictions, being Christians, will have the charity to forgive me for stating a fact of such general interest, that I cannot keep silence merely for the sake of some individual susceptibility. The ecclesiastical belief that religious souls alone are capable of the abnegation and angelic perseverance necessary for the salvation of the leper, or disinherited of the race, is contradicted by the cases of Laura Bridgman and Helen Keller, or, if you will, by the labours of Dr. Howe, Miss Sullivan and their collaborators. Because the first educational efforts for the blind and deaf mutes were undertaken by ecclesiastics (with the exception of Valentin Haüy), and as Marie Heurtin was rescued and educated

by a noble woman in a religious habit [1], they assert that only those who have renounced the joys of this world have sufficient self-sacrifice and moral strength to undertake tasks so heroic, and often painful. Miss Sullivan, however, and the greater number of those noble souls in America who spend their energy in making the lives of those unfortunate creatures tolerable, nay, almost enviable, belong to the laity. Although many of them have strong religious feelings (this is quite natural in the New World, where questions of faith are not argued, or even suggested) [2] they have not thought it necessary to take vows, or exile themselves from society, in order to undertake the hard and painful labour of making the dumb to speak, the deaf to hear, and the blind, in some measure, to see. They have accepted this overwhelming task

(1) Sister Sainte Marguerite, of the Congregation of the *Sœurs de la Sagesse*, at Larnay, was legitimately rewarded, in spite of her reluctance, with the Montyon prize, and by a panegyric from Ferdinand Brunetiére (1889). She also received one of the three civic crowns of the *Société d'encouragement au bien*.

(2) I do not mean to say that the United States is free from religious controversy, but that in the New World the controversy is not between belief and free-thought, or downright atheism, as in the Old World, where the question asked is, "Does any Divine power exist?"

quite simply, firstly, to earn an honest living, and secondly, to satisfy a passion for doing good. More than one of them has married, brought up children, and become a useful member of society.[1] The renunciation of all personal interest, and the sole desire to please God, Who is the Giver of infinite rewards, are therefore not indispensable for a sister-of-charity.

I have no wish to detract by the value of a hair from the merit of those who, in order to heal and console others, think it necessary to go into exile and keep their eyes constantly fixed on an approving crucifix. Still less, would I seem to discourage those thousands living in religious orders, from works which benefit mankind, whatever their secret motive. I hope that monks and nuns will continue to give themselves to these works, noble and ennobling, and even to receive all honour and praise for them. They could not employ their time more ideally—there will never be too many of us to counteract the innumerable outrages against nature. But it is precisely for that reason that the most exalted forms

(1) To mention Miss Sullivan only, who for the last seven or eight years has been the wife of Mr. Macy, who helps her in making the life of her pupil ever brighter.

of charity should not be attributed solely to an order of persons who claim the monopoly for themselves. With the evolution of philosophical and sociological ideas, we may safely predict an era when religious vocations will become more and more rare. They are extinct in almost every country where Roman Catholicism has been supplanted by other forms of religion, or by doubt, or unbelief. And in such cases what would become of sick, crippled, and insane people if their salvation depended only on the religious orders? The answer is given us by such cases as Laura Bridgman and Helen Keller—*i.e.*, that personal immolation is not the *sine qua non* for the relief of distress. This is re-assuring for modern society, which seems to desire, whether rightly or wrongly, an organisation founded on the sole moral standpoint of "doing good for good's sake." If there are no more hands sprinkled with holy water, there will be found others, no doubt increasing in number, to seize the sacred fire, and pass it on from one country and one generation to another.

* * *

This is perhaps the moment to regard the subject from the point of view of the Feminist movement.

At this time of agitation (sometimes excessive) in favour of the rights of women, it is, perhaps, hardly to the point to quote such examples as Miss Sullivan or Sister Sainte Marguerite, to complete the downfall of the old prejudice of the inferiority of one sex. At the same time, the transformation of an animal into an exceptionally educated and sensitive human being, seems to imply a higher capacity, mental strength, elevation of character, and all manner of virtues than existed in the reigns of Maria Theresa or Catherine of Russia. If Jeanne D'Arc, Jeanne Hachette, the demoiselles de Fernig, were living examples of the most magnificent exaltation of patriotic heroism of which women are capable, Miss Sullivan, Sister Sainte Marguerite, and their fellow-workers, are surely at the height of what the spirit of sacrifice and noble perseverance can do in the combat against the cruelty of fate. If I am not mistaken, the American women owe their exceptional powers of teaching, to the long War of Secession, when, since all the able-bodied men were fighting, they were substituted as professors in every branch of scholarship, to preserve the younger minds from ignorance while their elders were being

drowned in blood. No doubt, were English, French, or Belgian women placed in similar circumstances, they would also show the same brilliant aptitudes. One point also needs explanation: the title of the present book does not imply that to men is due the principal credit for the regeneration of which it tells; the title, "Man's Miracle," is used in a strictly generic sense, as woman has had as great a share as her partner in these marvellous efforts, perhaps because she is a mother in two senses of the word—a mother to create, and a mother to re-create the deformed creature. Be that as it may, the respective parts played by the sexes are divided in the work of *re-creation* of these poor creatures. With a few exceptions, the man has theorised, and the woman has put the theory into practice. No doubt she is organically more gifted than the man for the painful and delicate task, requiring patience and ingenuity, for the sustained and noble suffering which must of necessity be incurred in the relief of persistent disease, or the regeneration of the abnormal, or the cultivation of their faculties. When the Feminist movement is accomplished, and when the excesses of its demands shall have been reduced to the proportions sanctioned

by wisdom, it will no doubt contribute not so much to political agitation, and much more to the chain of generous hands employed in the diffusion of light by the circulation of the allegorical torch.

CHAPTER III

WHENCE COMES THE LIGHT?

PRIMITIVE MAN AND BLIND AND DEAF MUTES. THE DIFFERENCE IN THEIR EVOLUTION. THE PROOF OF HUMAN SPIRITUALITY. THE EFFECTS OF HEREDITY SHOWN. THE IDEA OF THE DIVINE IN THE TRIPLY AFFLICTED. A TRAGIC EPISODE IN THE LIFE OF LAURA BRIDGMAN—AND WHAT IT TEACHES. THE RELIGIOUS CONCEPT COMPARED WITH HUMAN ENERGY.

We have so far merely touched on the consequences, or possibilities, which the mind can conceive in considering the magnificent evolution of such miserable human outcasts. How many perspectives may still be unimagined? Before, however, extending our study in these directions, it would be well to go rather fully into another question—a question which is raised on the threshold of these marvellous experiences—the most perplexing and difficult of all, which for centuries has troubled every school of philosophy and faith. What light do the cases of Laura Bridgman, Helen Keller, and Marie Heurtin throw on the question of the origin of our nature?

Do we come into the world with innate, indestructible gifts, which may explain the progress of the age of flint to that of radium, and from what source do they come? From ourselves? From a tacit imperious law of nature, or from the unknown power proclaimed by the religions, which has made us superior to the rest of creation.

No scientific system has yet answered this question in a conclusive form. We have now before us three human beings capable of helping us. Before any efforts were made to awaken their understanding, they were as rudimentary, as imperfect, as limited in their means of inter-communication as the most distant of our ancestors in the cave, or the forest. It is as if we had among us, not fossils, but human specimens of that age, though strangely out of date. Why has science not been employed in searching, in the story of their enlightenment, for the very history of all human evolution? Who, better than they, could tell us from whence proceeded the spark which has grown and led to our present stage of active and intellectual power?

M. Arnould, the biographer of Marie Heurtin, does not hesitate in his answer to the problem. Accord-

ing to him, such phenomena show, by conclusive evidence, not only our own spirituality, but the existence of a Supreme Being Who rules our destinies. When he is not himself affirming this belief, he reproduces, in victorious tones, the writings of others who affirm it.

Far be it from me to engage personally in such a debate; I am not sufficiently a believer to dare to agree with M. Arnould and his co-religionists, nor sufficiently learned to dare to prove them wrong. Their categoric religious faith does not prevent my believing in their sincerity, although it has, without doubt, created in them a prejudiced state of mind which is bound to lead them to their conclusions, as fatally as the *credo* of materialism leads to the pole of negation. Moreover, nothing is more cruel (although such cruelty may appear necessary in some cases) than to seek to destroy intimate convictions which give security and happiness to uneasy minds. My only desire is to try to extract from these resurrections of living corpses, the maximum of absolute truth which they seem to teach, clearing my mind of all prejudice of sect, or school, even though I may

appear sometimes to disagree with all the sects and schools put together.

To begin with, it is important to remember that the wonderful evolution of Laura Bridgman and Helen Keller would prove no certain conclusions if their cases had not been compared with that of Marie Heurtin, born at Vertou (Loire Inférieure), in 1885, who was rescued from her sad condition, as we have already seen, by the Sisters of La Sagesse, at Larnay. The two former children having seen, heard and spoken as children speak, the first-named to the age of twenty-six months, the second to nineteen months, their teachers might be justified in thinking that their astonishing ultimate results were due to a simple awakening of a precocious memory. Marie Heurtin, however, was blind, deaf, and dumb from birth, and had been suffered by her parents, poor and ignorant people, to remain in this deplorable condition to the age of ten years. She, therefore, brings the desired proof to the statement of this fact—*i.e.*, the simultaneous birth of the powers of the body, and of an intelligence and consciousness apparently far above them, and defying all her limitations. In Marie Heurtin's case there was no personal memory possible of speech,

or sound, or any visible organization of life. She existed in dark night and silence, which completely, and apparently irrevocably, cut her off from the world. Ten years later Sister Sainte Marguerite, of Larnay, undertook to reveal the world to this outcast of humanity, who responded to her efforts and seconded them with ardour. One is, therefore, bound to believe that when this poor child drew her first breath she was endowed with an unquenchable spirit and brain, which, as soon as she came in contact with the indispensable awakening power, enabled her to represent to herself what her eyes had never seen, or ever would see, what her ears had never once heard, or would ever hear. St. Thomas Aquinas himself would have found the evidence conclusive. He would have proclaimed that ten thousand years of effort could never awaken a conscience, thought, or language in any species of quadruped, and that, therefore, consciousness exists, *à priori*, in us, since it can be illumined and born in the most obtuse of our race. Doubt is no longer possible. Beings of our species, even the lowest in intelligence, wear an intellectual royal crown in a world filled with inferior creatures. Even supposing that the theory of automatism

in animals is false, and that the brains of a dog, a cat, a horse, contain a spark of understanding which may one day be kindled—this spark must be fanned by our hands, and the beast will owe his mental elevation to men—to men who have discovered and lit, in the Laura Bridgmans, the Helen Kellers, the Marie Heurtins, those inert masses of flesh and blood, the hidden source of living light, the little lamp set so far from the electric current. No doubt science and simple observation have discovered long ago this royal heritage of mankind, but they have never produced more striking proofs than this one.

The difference in the respective results obtained in the treatment of Marie Heurtin, and the pupils of Dr. Howe and Miss Sullivan, places us in possession of another fact, not until now sufficiently insisted on, but not less valuable.

The education of Marie Heurtin is far from having produced results as varied and rich as that of Laura Bridgman or Helen Keller. Marie Heurtin has learnt to speak and listen by her fingers, to express her thoughts in writing, and to acquire an idea of things in general, extraordinary indeed, considering her early condition. At the same time, those persons

who have compared her with Helen Keller say that there is as great a difference between them, as between the ordinary peasant-girl, taught in primary schools, and the exceptionally gifted product of a university education. Marie Heurtin's biographer tells us, it is true, that Sister Sainte Marguerite made no effort to turn her into an intellectual prodigy, or to take the daughter of a working man out of her class. But by the light of the experience gained from the education of Laura Bridgman and Helen Keller, we may safely conclude that if the natural gifts of the interesting French girl had been of a superior calibre, they could not have been stinted by any limitation set by either good or evil intention. We have seen that Helen Keller owed the wonderful eclecticism of her knowledge not only to a great natural power of absorption, seconded by boundless devotion, but also to her avidity for knowledge; a disposition of mind expressed by the immortal cry of Goethe: "Light! Light! more Light!" The same qualities are also shown by Laura Bridgman. She learnt many more things than Marie Heurtin—many less than Helen Keller—but she learnt everything she had the desire and will to learn. She was

only limited by her own fatigue, not by the resources or patience of her teachers.

We can only conclude that the germ of understanding, which we are now certain is contained in all human embryos, varies in power and in quality, according to the power and quality of the producer of this germ, that is, the parents. In other words, the mental or spiritual fluid is transmitted with the physical, in proportion to its intensity in the progenitors. This theory is the most radical triumph of heredity. It is proved almost mathematically in such typical individuals as Laura Bridgman, Helen Keller, and Marie Heurtin. Laura's father was a well-to-do, healthy farmer, married to a woman of scrofulous constitution. Both were of superior intellectual status to the parents of Marie Heurtin, but greatly inferior to those of Helen Keller.[1] Laura Bridgman inherited the physical taint from her mother, but also a certain intellectual power and a leaning to piety from her father, who was a "pillar" of the Baptist church. Her teacher, Dr. Howe, who was a firm religious believer, hoped

(1) This is proved by the fact that at one time they thought seriously of exhibiting their child for money, as a phenomenon in Barnum's show, and were only prevented from doing so by the opposition of Dr. Howe.

much from her education, and its partial failure drew from him the remark, "that he had not reckoned sufficiently on hereditary influences."

Helen came of a better stock, both physically and mentally. Her triple infirmity resulted from an accident, and not from any hereditary taint. Though the loss of her three principal senses would have led one to believe that her development, in comparison with that of her parents, would be either stationary or retrograde when once she regained full consciousness, the spiritual germ in her nature is so strong that she has actually outstripped them. Marie Heurtin, on the other hand, who was supposed to be an idiot up to the age of ten years, was severely handicapped by her parentage. She was the offspring of cousins, who had nine children, of whom three were deaf and dumb, two were blind, one ricketty, and one died in infancy. Thus only two of the children were quite normal. The humble and unfortunate parents of these miserable beings were honest, decent people, but quite ignorant and uneducated. M. Arnould will have universal sympathy when he says that the education of the blind and deaf mute issued from this pitiable family is one of

the greatest achievements of the end of the 19th century. But the extent of this education was much more limited than in the case of Laura Bridgman, and infinitely more so than in that of Helen Keller, on account of hereditary influence. A comparison between these cases establishes, beyond doubt, that in the first, the natural subconscious light transmitted by the father and mother was weak, in the second it was meagre, in the third exceptionally powerful and radiant, obeying a rigorous law governing all of these cases.

A consideration presents itself here. What use will be made of these facts by the theorists who hold the irresponsibility of criminals through the fact of atavism? Perhaps a use that may easily grow into abuse, unless they bear in mind that the law of heredity acts in two ways. If all criminals are indiscriminately excused because their genealogy reveals insanity or alcoholism, all merit is also withdrawn from the best and greatest men whose progenitors may have been the flower of humanity. I venture to suggest a fairer theory. Society, the antithesis of Ugolino, readily devours the fair fame of its fathers, in order to secure indulgence for pos-

terity. The past is made the scapegoat. But its legacy to us is not always one of debts; very often it bequeathes us a certain capital. If we make it responsible for our faults and crimes, must we not, on the other hand, credit it with our first impulses towards righteous, honourable, and brilliant exploits? You say that your errors must be imputed to the indelible mark left by an ancestor. Perhaps—but it is also certain that side by side with this mark, your ancestor has left another; the indelible faculty of understanding and determining the extent and consequence of your actions. Which of these two marks has made the deepest impression on you? This, I think, is a consideration for the criminologists, if they desire to weigh the different degrees of free-will among the living, and the responsibility of the dead.

Above all, the principal consideration which arises from what I have called "Man's Miracle" is the use to be made of the light thrown on this mystery of heredity from the point of view of puericulture, or what the physiologists begin to name ante-natal culture. From the moment that it is proved that no creature, however miserable, comes into the world without the essential element of spirituality, there

need be no despair, even for the most unpromising subject. The useless stocks in the human harvest are reduced to almost nothing, provided that we work systematically at the cultivation of even the poorest specimens. The teachers who have made of these wretched little blind and deaf mutes what they have ultimately become, need not fear any bounds to their ambition. Guided by their own discoveries, they may dare to do all they dream of, knowing that they inherit the talisman which each generation passes on to the next, and which no malevolence of nature can destroy, if they are resolute in holding it.

* * *

The sole possible objection is that, made from the religious point of view. If all our efforts and our actions are subordinate to a divine will, it is this will which has permitted, we know not why, the accomplishment of our work, and which, for reasons equally inscrutable, may ordain that it fail to-morrow. I must be excused from enumerating the interminable array of facts, which, in the annals of human progress, protest against such a presumption. Such a recital would give to the present work a polemical character which I do not desire. I will,

therefore, be content with examining, as subjectively as possible, this human miracle which we are asked to consider as superhuman.

Let us suppose for an instant, that the germ of consciousness, or sub-consciousness, which has developed in such a triumphant fashion in our blind and deaf mutes, has been secreted in them by a supernatural and occult power. It must have remained for ever sterile, without the intervention of Providences in flesh and blood. As long as these did not present themselves, the afflicted children must have remained in that condition. Laura Bridgman, Helen Keller, and Marie Heurtin were in a completely brutish state, the first to the age of nine years, the second to seven, and the third (with the outward appearance of a "monster") to ten years, that is, until the one was discovered and treated as a being capable of redemption by Dr. Howe, the second till she was confided to the care of Miss Sullivan, and the third till she was taken to the Sisters of La Sagesse, at Larnay, by her despairing parents. All these children would have vegetated up to their last hour in the tragedy of their night, without the help of these three fearless and purely terrestrial

wills, encouraged by a century-and-a-half of struggle, often successful, against difficulties less insurmountable but almost as impossible in appearance. This is beyond all controversy; the little lamp which lay useless in the consciences of Laura, Helen, and Marie was condemned never to be re-lit, had not men and women suspected its existence, and set themselves resolutely to make a pathway towards it, to re-light it, and make it capable of fulfilling its divine office.

We must admit that at the root of these generous enterprises (I have mentioned it before) we usually trace the charity of priests, whose vocation leads them in search of the relief of distress, and it must follow, if we study the systems of theologians, not only that their results are those of faith, the lever with which to move mountains, but further, that this is absolutely fixed, and that the scientific auxiliaries are mechanically obeying a heavenly inspiration. It is possible that these hypothetical systems may go to the subjects themselves for new proofs. Marie Heurtin has formally manifested her faith in a superhuman Providence, which only subjected her to the trial of darkness and silence in order to make her

enjoy later the delight of celestial concerts and infinite light, and Laura Bridgman expressed sentiments as piously as did her father before falling into a state of superstitious bigotry, which even her instructor, the devout Dr. Howe, deplored. Helen Keller accepted and preserved the idea of the Divine in spite of her mental communication with positivist philosophers. Are not these evidences specially worthy of credit from the very reason of their imperfection, and the consideration that religious faith must respond to reality, since it is found, under one form or another, in the instinct of the most primitive people, or in the most uncultivated individuals?

Truth forces me to say that facts (I am only concerned with these) categorically contradict this interpretation. First, it is evident that, even if the three afflicted children had kept, during their time of darkness, the light of conscience which guided them to a fuller life, their saviours found in them no idea at all of a supernatural power. They were quite ignorant, on the contrary, that life comes to an inexorable end, and they were so far from having any suspicion of what is meant by death (without which the idea of a divine power and future destiny would

never arise) that the revelation of this melancholy end to existence aroused in each of them by turn a cry of despair and of tragic revolt, of which I shall speak later in touching on another order of ideas. Further: when heaven was mentioned, Laura Bridgman, atavistically pre-disposed to belief, asked a number of questions: "What is heaven made of—wood or iron?" "Has it a door?" "How do we know that God lives there?" The puzzled governess, who replied to the last question, "We know that by a book," received, it appeared, a sharp reprimand. The constitution of the convent was used as an analogy (I learnt this from M. Arnould's work) to make Marie Heurtin understand the idea of an invisible supreme head of creation. Thus, above the pupils were the Sisters, above the Sisters, the Lady Abbess, above the Abbess, the Bishop, above the Bishop, the head of all the Bishops, viz., the Pope, above the Pope, the Sovereign Lord. Further still, when she was asked who had made the sun, she replied, without hesitation, "The baker." The answer resulted from very simple logic. She had been taken to a bakery and had been taught the manner of making bread. She had felt the heat of

the oven, and very naturally the blind girl, who was only aware of the existence of the sun by its heat, pictured to herself the sun as a movable oven, made by human hands. If her teacher had confirmed this belief, the child would have thought to this day that the sun, which lights and warms us, was the work of a man who makes hot rolls. It was necessary to tell her that it was made by divine power before she believed it in her turn. The letter from Canon Naeghels, at the end of this volume, to which I have already alluded, is still more suggestive. It states in the frankest terms the doubts felt and expressed by a high dignitary of the church on any idea being existent in the blind and deaf mute, Alexis Decramer, of a divinity. "We do not know what is taking place in these souls, "*Nous ne savons pas ce qui se passe dans ces âmes!*"

As to Helen Keller, a creature endowed with far greater mental capacity, her initiation into the dogmas of faith excited in her a violent opposition, to judge from the questions she showered on her teacher, the same questions one often finds on the lips of normal children. "If God created the world and men, who created God?" "If death is necessary, as you say,

to prevent the world from becoming over-peopled, why does not God, Who you say is all-powerful, create other worlds where people can go on living indefinitely?"

I will not insist further. It is quite clear that the idea of a world regulated by a power and a superhuman will, had never arisen spontaneously in the minds of the three girls whose mental past we have been considering. It was an artificial grafting, the work of patient educative toil, destined to a complete success. Naturally, these girls, originally so incapable of knowing and judging for themselves, could hardly have done otherwise than impose silence on their own doubts and hesitations, and accept with humble deference the versions of our origin and our end, put before them by their generous benefactors and confirmed with all the authority of a palpable Providence. I hope I shall not be misunderstood. I do not wish to find any fault with Dr. Howe, or the Sisters of La Sagesse (least of all with them) for having imposed these views on their pupils. I could be persuaded quite easily that in the hypothesis of the non-existence of God, it is precisely for such victims of life that this aspect of things might be invented.

What illusions, what comforting fairy tales would, nay, ought not to be made, in order to present some striking example of justice, some full and beautiful future reward for such pathetically unfortunate souls!

* * *

Here I will introduce an episode in the life of Laura Bridgman, discreetly related by some witnesses of her evolution. In consequence of some disastrous indiscretion of her governess, or companion, Laura, at twenty years of age, became aware of the physiological attraction between the sexes. She assured herself by questioning others, and by touch, that she was pretty, and from that time she was haunted by the dream of marriage. She went so far, that one night she was discovered trying on a wedding dress, made for one of the governesses, and left, as a temporary arrangement, in the young girl's room. Very soon this aspiration towards mutual love, perhaps towards maternity, showed itself in a heart-rending incident. Her teacher, Miss Wright, was engaged to a young missionary, Mr. Bond, who, naturally in his visits to his fiancée, showed a special kindness to her pupil. Laura misunderstood his feel-

ings of compassion—she persuaded herself that she had inspired Mr. Bond with a passion that she returned, and that it was her hand to which he aspired. When her secret was discovered, and she had been undeceived, she turned pale, then sobbed, and her trembling fingers traced in Miss Wright's hand this touching question, "Then, am I not beautiful?" She felt all the torture of helpless love, and all the pangs of jealousy. They were obliged to tell her everything—that she was not like other women, but a creature apart, whose race must be extinguished, not perpetuated, for fear of bringing into the world other outcasts to be a menace to the human race.

A young actress, to whom, last winter, I related this painful moral operation, exclaimed, "What a tragedy! It ought to be played on the stage."

An Æschylus, or a Sophocles, could have written it. As for us, we live in an age when humanity has carried to its remotest limits the courage to look ourselves in the face, and to probe misery and suffering to their lowest depths. But there are many materialists who would say, viewing such a spectacle of desolation, that they could find no fault with religious education

for having falsified realities in order to hold up to Laura Bridgman a paradise rich in every joy at the end of her earthly torment.

This brings us back to the heart of our subject. From whatever source comes the spark of spirituality, without which the evolution of the Bridgmans, the Kellers and the Heurtins would have been impossible, it is certainly present in all of us by the workings of a law of infallible succession. I have shown, in this history of our blind deaf mutes, one of the two reasons by which we believe that the spark was always there, and that its attribution to a super-human power is only a later invention made by man to satisfy his craving for immortality and to console him for his immediate misery. But I willingly confess that I am not as certain as are the partisans of the other hypothesis as to the origin of the human race, and in order to be able to deny, as they think they are authorised to affirm, one ought to have witnessed the making of our prototype. I did not do so. Did they ?

In spite of the giant strides made by deductive cience, we are still faced by a mystery, round which two conjectures are equally and fearfully posed.

The important thing is to determine which of the two is the more advantageous to the progress of society on the firm ground of our planet.

If we concede to believers the possibility of an invisible God, they, on their side, ought to concede to unbelievers the genius of man who has known how to find Him, to admire and adore Him, in conceiving His infinite majesty from the limited space and conditions of existence and time, rigorously determined by geographical boundaries and the planks of a coffin. Imagine, amongst the most intelligent of insects, an ant, who, from its ant-hill, and with its absurdly microscopic powers of appreciation, could measure the height of Mont Blanc and the time to be taken in its ascent. It would have accomplished a feat very inferior to that of a man, the prisoner of a narrowly bounded world and a brief existence, who can conceive a space without beginning or end, and an eternity filled by an omniscient and omnipotent spirit. Is it not admissible, if the logic of what Maeterlinck calls "naked reason" is worth anything, that the imagination, which is capable of having dreamed, attempted and realized the liberation of blind and deaf mutes, is also capable,

in its aspirations towards better and more beautiful things, of having invented the hidden Being placed so high above itself and everything else? Or again, setting aside this premeditation, it would not be astonishing if the concept which man takes for a God is simply the shadow which he himself projects before his own path in his victorious way through life.

The question put in this form may irritate to the point of indignation those whose conviction is fixed in the opposite belief. At certain moments, however, their own hypothesis makes of the human being, illuminated from above, the lieutenant, the terrestrial *alter ego* of a supreme and limitless power. Is it better that man, for the sake of his ulterior conquests, should know or proudly believe himself the master of the universe, or that he should consider himself, in all humility, as a simple recipient of power which can be withdrawn at will? That is the real question. Evidently, there must be different solutions according to the diverse individuals and mentalities which make up humanity. But all things considered, the general opinion might well be in favour of the first of these two attitudes, since it would be more conducive to action. And, once more, to set aside all prejudice in

favour of any particular creed, does it not seem that the confidence of human beings in their own methods will more surely facilitate the success of their enterprises, than a feeling of subordination and dependence on an unknown force? Whatever they do, or are, religious systems imply a sort of docile fatalism, susceptible of paralyzing the enterprise and energy of those who accept them without reserve. For every fifty, hundred, or ten thousand priests, monks, or lay-Christians who struggle with conviction against the ills of nature, how many others of goodwill are not discouraged at the sight of some great distress, by this tendency to resignation turned into a virtue by pious books? One can scarcely imagine Job endeavouring, by the aid of natation or aviation, to escape from the natural element to which he believed himself tied by a supreme decree. What would he have done before such cases as those of Helen Keller and Marie Heurtin, but fold his arms, bow his head, and signify his submission by an Arabic version of "*Fiat voluntas tua!*"

A Dutch philosopher, who paid a visit some years ago to Marie Heurtin, repeated a remark made by her, which he called "consoling for human nature,"

without appearing to suspect the dangerous counsel of surrender which it contains. Someone had offered to take the poor girl to Lourdes to implore the Virgin to restore her sight. She replied with the firmest conviction, putting her fingers over her eyes, "No, I would rather remain as I am. I would rather not see here on earth, and see more clearly the light up there." It does not matter whether we believe or not in the miraculous virtue of Notre-Dame de Lourdes. The real meaning of this speech, of the education which inspired it, and the approbation which it called forth in pious minds, is in the principle of the inertia which opposes all effort and all progress. The misery, ignorance, and suffering of the world are presented as the necessary means to an infinite future happiness. That this remark should have delighted a Dutch philosopher (influenced, perhaps, by the wonderful effects which his illustrious compatriot, Rembrandt, made of the contrasts of shadow and light) is very astonishing, showing a strange confusion between the canons of purely plastic æsthetics and the rules of the conduct of life in regard to the unknown. If we subscribed in a general way to this method of facing the trials of existence, the entire world would come

to a standstill in the midst of its struggle against its imperfections and distress, and surrender to its fate, like the personage of the Bible, on the dunghill of the land of Uz. There is hardly any reason, however, for such fear in the future. There seems, on the contrary, less tendency to turn the other cheek meekly to the buffets of fortune, and a greater inclination to meet and defy them, with a manly determination to conquer them. The victorious re-constitutions of blind and deaf mutes bring a new eloquence and new arguments to prove the rightness of this attitude.

We might go still further on the pathway of prevision. If anyone were disposed to predict the day when man will succeed in delaying indefinitely the hour of his death, such miracles would assuredly strengthen his hope. Most certainly this day will never dawn if we persist in believing that our destiny is in the hands of an arbiter who has inflexibly assigned its actual frontier. But it may come, if man will attribute to himself the virtue of his guiding star, and will attain to an absolute faith in his own resources for struggling without hesitation against any obstacle, physical or moral, which limits his field

and his horizon. Simply by conjuring up this future, we seem to hear the clarion cry calling trembling and rejuvenated souls to the battle against death itself.

CHAPTER IV

THE WORSHIP OF LIFE

A DREAM OF IMMORTALITY. THE REVELATION OF DEATH TO BLIND AND DEAF MUTES. THE VALUE OF EXISTENCE. HOW TO TEACH IT IN SCHOOLS. THE OPTIMISM OF HUMANITY'S OUTCASTS. ITS CAUSES. HELEN KELLER'S PRIVILEGES. THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF HER EXAMPLE.

Time alone will determine whether the conclusion in the preceding chapter is absurdly ambitious. But we can already rely confidently on the influence which the lesson of our blind and deaf mutes' lives may have on our general attitude in regard to life, when once this lesson is widely and methodically spread abroad. If we criticise, as minutely as I myself have done, all the writings concerning Laura Bridgman, Helen Keller, and Marie Heurtin, we shall be convinced that even for the most deplorably afflicted creatures, life is the most inestimable treasure. Remembering Hamlet's soliloquy, and asking the question, "Is life worth living?"—Laura Bridgman, Helen Keller, and Marie Heurtin have

Wrentham Cottage, presented to HELEN KELLER
by the town of Boston.

replied "yes!" without hesitation, and with a greater authority than any other to be found in the world. But at what period of life? When their martyrdom had been relieved by education and by all it brought of comfort and joy? No, before that: from the hour—when they were very young—when they were first told of death.

I have related earlier—promising to return to the subject—that this revelation revolted them. The mere idea of growing old, of having wrinkles, of ceasing to be like herself, exasperated Marie Heurtin intensely, so said her biographer, when first the information was suggested to her by making her feel the lines on the face of an old woman. This poor girl, deprived of the most elementary conditions of happiness, protested vehemently, and declared that she would struggle against this degradation. The proofs of death—revealed to her in the same manner, *i.e.*, in making her touch an ice-cold corpse—filled her with horror. It was also the case with Laura Bridgman. She came near to death herself on learning that she would never meet again one of her little sisters, who had gone to the place from whence no one returns. Helen Keller felt precisely the same.

The "news" crushed her. Her stupefaction only gave way to the most cruel bitterness. She appeared to doubt the God Whose existence was affirmed to her, for she could not understand that He could create with the inflexible intention of destroying. We are, therefore, completely in the right when we conclude that the idea of death is not transmitted from one to another of us with the physical and spiritual sap. The light of our little interior lamp does not shine as far as the tomb. It is life which it promises to us. In our innocence we confidently expect immortality from the dawning of our life, as soon as our eyes are open.

In the case of normal children, the destruction of this instinctive and dear illusion comes gently, slowly, almost imperceptibly. The truth comes by degrees, and we go down to meet it by little stages and gentle descents. Our ears are familiarised with the name of the intruder, by whispers, before hearing it spoken out loud. We hear, first vaguely, then more openly, of dear departed ones. We are shown their portraits, all that remain of them. We have seen black processions, solemn and silent; we learn by half-spoken sentences what they convey, and

where they are going: or we have seen on pale and beloved faces the strange signs of trouble, and the mute anguish of our older friends have prepared us for the agony. Since the certainty of a common destiny has gradually penetrated our very being, we feel no shock. We seem always to have known it. The surprise and horror of the blind and deaf mutes who had not been prepared by any spectacles or confidences, or gradual impressions, prove that we deceive ourselves, or that we are born with a tacit conviction that our life will be prolonged to an indefinite limit.

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We can imagine the torture of the first conscient being who, believing that he has come into a world where he will always remain, is confronted suddenly with the terrible truth. If such a being existed in a cavern of pre-historic creatures, before even the glacial age, and was disabused without previous warning, he would be, without doubt, the greatest martyr of all ages. As a matter of fact he did exist, he exists still: he is found among the blind and deaf mutes in their first step from the darkness of ignorance. Here, again, we need the genius of the great

Greek tragedians to paint their disenchantment and horror of mind. The Laura Bridgmans, the Helen Kellers, and the Marie Heurtins have felt this fall from their dearest dreams to the fearful and humiliating reality. By a reversal of the original plan of evolution, it seemed to them, when they were snatched from their *non*-existence, that they issued from a passing death to enter an infinite life. And the overwhelming truth, towards which life itself has led us, with all kinds of preparation and softening palliatives, rose suddenly before them in all its horror, as, through a rift in the mist, a rock comes into sight on which the ship must break. To Laura, Helen and Marie the final ultimatum came without prelude, with the shock of thunder. They felt the whole edifice of confidence, of the godlike and glorious security on which in their innocence they unsuspectingly relied, crumble away at once.

It would seem that up to that time the terrible idea had been withheld from them by some supreme justice intent on compensating them by a rare privilege. One may ask if it is not our duty to keep this privilege intact, and to keep silence on the abominable destiny which will shatter their beautiful

dreams. But, on reflection, we shall see the impossibility of this charitable deceit—for we can learn nothing of the secrets of life without coming in contact with its funereal wall. How, for instance, could Helen Keller have been instructed in the history of ancient civilizations and their decay had she not been taken, to begin with, amongst the cypresses and the eloquent melancholy of the cemetery.

In any case, truths of kindness and mercy may be found in the cries and tears which the fatal revelation drew from these unfortunate children. Life seems to have so much sweetness, so high a value, even for the most meanly gifted of beings, that they rebel with all their force at the prospect of losing it.

In theory the grim announcement should have come as an unhoped for message of deliverance to these unhappy ones. As a practical result we see them convulsed with terror and despair. One could not possibly have a more striking example of the fact, that life, the most sacred treasure for us all, has the right to the most absolute respect. Helen and Marie are able to proclaim it more insistently than any living beings. However insignificant is the insect

which we crush in carelessness, or for a mere whim, we are destroying something palpitating with life, and which merely by being alive enjoys a measure of well-being stronger than all its suffering.

* * *

If these profound truths were clearly and incisively taught to children when their minds are receptive and malleable enough to receive every impression, whether good or evil, they would incite childhood, and afterwards adult humanity, to shun a thousand cruel sports in which they engage. Societies for the protection of animals, or humanitarian lecturers, work by fits and starts at teaching this worship of life in all its visible forms. At the turnings of certain roads we often see notices exhorting us to treat with kindness the lower animals; those called higher we have already domesticated and made useful, or sociable, for our own comfort or amusement. But we must all feel that in placing systematically and despotically at the root of our teaching, the principle of respect due to this essential, precious, and dominant thing called life, we shall eventually reach every person who is not originally perverted, and

all malignant and cruel actions will gradually grow more and more rare.

We will not discuss here, the modern tendency in cultured people to exclude the religious element from educational programmes in order to reserve to young consciences their free choice in coming to maturity. Let us loyally recognize this fact—that even with the most convinced reformers there is a sense of uneasiness, more or less acknowledged, of the perilous consequences which may follow from a rigidly neutral system of education, a system so impartial that it seems to aim at imprinting no definite mark that might hamper their future independence. The morality which accompanies religious instruction may seem narrow, incomplete, and of insufficient purity, since in preaching virtue it makes an appeal to the fear of punishment or the hope of reward, both, by reason of their eternity, utterly disproportionate to the ignoble, or noble, actions of our short existence. *Nevertheless, it is* a morality, and we can only supplant it by something equivalent, or better, by reverting to the ideal of a simple instilling of facts whose trend and meaning the mind, as it grows older, will gradually discover for itself.

Perhaps in studying such subjects as this one before us now, we may arrive at a solution of this delicate and urgent question. Let us analyze ourselves a little more closely, instead of lingering in the nebulous regions of abstract theory.

Though a teacher at first despairs of making an indolent or naturally dull pupil understand elementary instruction, he would be able to shame such pupils and incite them to further efforts by telling them to what a degree of knowledge, by means of strength of will and application, these poor children have attained, deprived from their birth, or soon afterwards, of sight, hearing and speech. And the teacher, stimulated by these striking examples, would himself be spurred on. No difficulty which the education of a normal child might present would seem insurmountable nor continue to baffle him if he had always present in his mind the miracles worked on the deaf, the dumb and the blind by the ardent perseverance and ingenuity of the Abbés de l'Epée, the Valentin Haüys, the Dr. Howes, the Miss Sullivans, the Sister Sainte Marguerites in the intellectual world. Similar attempts to stimulate rivalry have been practised with success in the physical and sporting worlds

by the constant publication of "records." These inducements have always been instinctively used by children themselves, who, endeavouring for amusement to jump as far as possible, draw a line on the ground marking the extreme point attained by the longest previous jump, trying to reach it in their turn, and to exceed it if they can.

* * *

This may seem to have little to do with morality, I think that it can be introduced in this manner in the most unbiassed forms of instruction, by the periodic insistence in schools on actions and fine qualities, which seem to be contagious simply from their intrinsic worth, confirmed by the sanction of society. Every element of this system of education designed to awaken and develop (apart from all philosophic doctrine) aspirations towards good, and re-act against the instinct of evil, has existed around us for some time without receiving much attention. To quote only a few examples: the systems called Montyon in France, Nobel in Norway, Bastin in Belgium, Carnegie in the United States, and other State organisations have instituted judges of courage, of devotion, of abnegation, of altruism in every form,

judges who reward good actions, either obscure or striking, as repressive magistrates condemn bad actions. This is a permanent competition open to all the virtues, in which the most sincere participate without being aware of it, as these have acted from natural disinterestedness to satisfy their simple and high conception of duty towards their neighbour. The judge makes a discourse, sometimes superfluous, but always of a high order of merit, where the praise of the most meritorious actions is often pronounced (at the French Academy, for instance) by masters of thought, of style, or psychological analysis. In these annals of Christianity, as it were, will be found among many other merited panegyrics, the account and glorification of the marvel accomplished by a sister of the congregation of Larnay, in the metamorphosis of the unhappy little blind and deaf mute, Marie Heurtin. How easy it would be to circulate regularly in the primary schools and the colleges this list of honours, with an abridged account of these really practical courses of morality, whether they are given to the pupils without commentary, or, in oral or written form, to stimulate the reflections that may be found there.

Those persons who do not know what to substitute for Catholicism, will ask what manual of dogma is equal to such a persuasive code of human duty, what *acta sanctorum* will have such a healthy influence on young minds as this touching record of admirable facts and actions accomplished, not in bygone epochs, by historic or legendary persons, but here, to-day, in the neighbouring town or village, often by humble individuals who do not dream of any kind of canonisation while living so nobly their daily life.

No doubt some isolated attempts of this kind have been set on foot, but they ought to be systemised; they will improve automatically, for they only represent the feeble embryos of a method devoted to the renewing of culture—by which is meant the moral regeneration of a decadent society.

But—I do not hesitate to repeat myself in such a cause—it is the veneration, the worship of life, which, above all, must spring from the stories of the Bridgmans, the Kellers, the Heurtins. Once thoroughly impregnated with the idea of the sacred inviolability of the right to live up to the natural term, our minds will acquire, naturally, by the logical

sequence of ideas, respect for material property, which is the essential condition of every existence. Take, for example, before his adolescence, one of these recent bandits who believes he can justify his thefts and crimes by his right to live. Unless he was absolutely predestined to crime by his nature (born of atavistic fatality) such a psychic preparation would have the effect of restraining his desires and criminal tendencies. For he would have learnt to understand that the right to life is "bilateral"—nay "unilateral"; that there is no such thing as the egoistic monopoly of an individual, but a universal inheritance extending from the poorest to the richest, from the old man to the newly-born, from the most perfect creature to the most deformed, to all, in fact, who draw breath, and fight against the idea of destruction—to such an extent has the attachment to existence taken root even in the most meanly-equipped of human beings.

* * *

Further, the study of the lives of our blind and deaf mutes will instil in many persons, that philosophic disposition which makes for happiness in many unfortunate creatures in spite of their suffering. We have seen how Laura Bridgman, Helen Keller

and Marie Heurtin fought against the idea of the suppression of their existence, so impossible to endure as it seems to us. When this idea had become solidly established they accustomed themselves to it, as do we all, and by degrees they became interested in the thousand immediate preoccupations which hang successive curtains between to-day and the inexorable to-morrow. Then they grew to appreciate life more subtly, if not more fully, than those to whom fate has refused nothing. All their biographers agree in seeing in them a gradual growth of joy, gaiety and rare optimism. Helen, the most sensitive, intelligent and explicit of the three, who is capable of analysing her sensations, and many of ours, with the accuracy of a chemist, and to express them with the power of a painter, has told us the reason. She considered that certain of her infirmities were real *privileges* which made her more contented, in many ways, than most normal individuals. These infirmities helped her, by the intense concentration of her faculties, to educate herself more completely than integral persons, whose sight is spread over many objects at a time, and who learn superficially, since with their eyes and ears

they learn too fast, with too little effort, and with what one may call a "deplorable facility." (1)

When the greater part of elementary knowledge had been acquired despite so many initial difficulties, what must have been the pride and delight of these pariahs of nature when they counted over the new treasures in their minds, like a beggar, who by dint of work, courage or genius, has climbed the first steps on the ladder of fortune.

The memory of the species of hell from which these condemned beings had emerged, made by contrast, a paradise of their new condition, the reverse of that experienced by the soul in the Christian legend who came to life again in the world and its struggles, and

(1) From this point of view the case of Helen Keller has reminded me more than once of the invisible chess player who, hidden in the interior of the so-called automatic machine of Vaucanson, was able to beat almost any one who played with him. Isolated in front of the reflector of the chess board, he was able to concentrate and direct all his faculties on his game, and triumph without difficulty over his adversary who played standing outside, under the eyes of the spectators, in the midst of whispers and all the attendant noises. No doubt only a first-rate chess player could win every time, even behind the shelter, but his adversary, waiting outside, needed to be infinitely his superior to beat him. This may serve to explain in part, how Helen Keller, as a student at a University, gave a proof of more knowledge, and carried away with her more distinctions and diplomas than any of her companions provided with sight, hearing and speech. Her attention was not dispersed, was never turned from the point it was fixed on by exterior circumstances.

whose eyes retained the reflection of the dazzling mysteries seen beyond this life. In the place of the senses destroyed, they drew on the senses remaining to them, employed them in a different manner from ours, and obtained from them ecstasies of which we are ignorant (1).

There are things of course which blind and deaf mutes can never positively assimilate, which they can only in some measure imagine, and others which they can well do without, being painful without being indispensable. It follows that they make images for themselves, beautiful pictures more wonderful than nature, and that, on the other hand, many of the ugly and painful sides of life escape them. The sun of their imagination has no spots.

They are relatively in the condition of a monk in his cell, of an intellectual being enclosed in a prison, of a contemplative fakir in his voluntary solitude. Deeply meditative, thrown back on themselves, they live a personal life, more profound and intimate

(1) Helen Keller, in speaking of her olfactory sense, declares that she doubts whether any pleasures from the eye are more delicious than the scent which came to her, "the exhalation of the foliage, warmed by the sun, and wafted by the wind, in a sea of perfumes which advances, retires, and returns wave on wave, filling the world with an invisible sweetness."

than the immense majority among us, with the advantage of being able to create a radiant conception of all that lives and moves outside of their circle of shadow.

Thus, far from pitying herself, Hellen Keller at times considers herself a subject for envy. She feels all the beauty of the illusions which flower in such darkness, and she understands the reasons which made the blind man of M. Clemenceau in *Le Voile du Bonheur* ask for his blindness again—for she writes in her letter: "The most beautiful world is the world we enter by the door of imagination. If you aspire to be something you are not, something infinitely noble, or infinitely good, you may shut your eyes, and during the moment of dreaming by voluntary blindness, you become the person of your ideal."

* * *

Would not a single example of this kind, transmitted from brain to brain, suffice to make perfectly clear the entire significance of the worship of life? Not only would it unveil for the disinherited the energies slumbering in us which may make existence less hard, but it would teach the most desperate that

there is no harshness of destiny which has not its compensation, on condition that we search for it—in short, that life, under whatever aspect it presents itself, may seem delightful, if we adapt ourselves resolutely to make it smile.

If it is thought that I exaggerate the future moral influence of the examples of the blind and deaf mutes, I will relate a personal experience.

Since I became interested in these phenomena, that is, since they came to my notice, I have never mentioned them in any surroundings without exciting immediate and intense interest. Exclamations of surprise, first of incredulity, then of delight, have always occurred. Other subjects of conversation have been abruptly stopped, and all ears have given attention in order to lose nothing. I have been assailed with questions to which it was not always possible to reply *ex abrupto*. Children, leaving their play, have come up to me, their eyes wide open, their hands touching me with coaxing gestures, to learn, as if it were a fairy tale, other details of the marvellous story. Doctors, professors, have begged me to give them means of finding out all the facts possible. I was asked to give a recital of this

touching story in a fashionable drawing room, between two programmes of music, singing or dancing, and in this frivolous society I saw young men and women, the reverse of sentimental, with tears in their eyes at this story of "man's miracle," at the mere suggestion of the lessons which it teaches and I judge, therefore, that these lessons will find most imaginations ready to welcome and absorb them.

CHAPTER V

Other Lessons or Other Pathways

A SOCIETY OF THE AMBIDEXTROUS. THE CULTIVATION OF THE SENSES OF TOUCH AND SMELL: ITS RESULTS. HELEN KELLER, THOUGHT-READER AND PALMIST. NIGHT AND DAY IN EDUCATION. THE INFINITESIMAL VIBRATIONS IN THE AIR. AN EXTRAORDINARY EXERCISE OF MEMORY. ITS DRAMATIC CONSEQUENCES AND ITS MORAL. THE MYSTERIES OF SLEEP AND DREAMS IN NORMAL AND ABNORMAL PERSONS. THE SIXTH SENSE. THE HISTORY OF HUMAN LANGUAGE.

Up to the present we have only glanced at the general consequences arising from these transformations of our subjects from a state of animalism to intelligent and cultivated beings.

It is high time that we descended from the general to the particular, and enquired what direction a study of these exceptional existences might give to certain sciences, or to researches of a speculative character.

It would be doing an injustice to such women as Laura Bridgman and Helen Keller to treat them simply as curious and passive examples of spiritual

anatomy. They have—especially the second-named (as has already been noticed)—an instinct for educating others, that instinct of proselytism or mental propagation which we may find, if we search for it, in nearly everyone, side by side with the physical law for the perpetuation of the race. Laura Bridgman was no sooner initiated in the language of touch than she began to teach it to her mother, to create between them the same link which had been formed between the pupil and her teachers, Dr. Howe and Miss Wright—and later, she helped Dr. Howe, with enthusiasm and success, to communicate the magic secret to a little boy, Oliver Caswell, also a blind and deaf mute, and treated, like her, at the Perkins Institute at Boston. Helen Keller had no sooner learnt to spell words on her fingers, than one evening this delicious picture was seen. Helen was lying on the carpet near her dog, Bell, holding one of his paws in her hand, and trying to talk to him by this method, supposing he could be educated in the same manner as herself. Who knows whether this childish and touching fancy may not one day be verified in some degree, when a series of Buffons may devote themselves to the development of the inferior

species in the animal world, as they have devoted themselves to the daughters and sons of night [1]. But the *indirect* means by which the example of the blind and deaf mutes may enrich the sources of progress, promises to be yet more considerable.

Let us take for example the marvellous results which have come from the constant exercise of the two senses —touch and smell. They give us an idea of the extreme sensitiveness of our means of perception, provided that we try to use them seriously and appreciate their value. Everyone knows that a school of physiologists has for long exhorted nurses and mothers to train an ambidextrous society by accustoming children from infancy to use their two hands indifferently. They appear to have preached to deaf ears, although the simultaneous training of the right

(1) One of my neighbours has an intelligent little griffon who understands perfectly a great number of words, and often certain phrases. They say to him, for instance, "Call your master and tell him that dinner is ready." He goes at once to his master's study door and barks significantly, and if this does not produce the desired effect, he rushes into the study and repeats his barking, either furiously, or with an appealing inflexion, until he has been obeyed. This is, perhaps, less striking as an anecdote than the proofs of intelligence given by the dog of Montargis, or the performances of learned dogs, but it is a significant addition to a thousand other facts showing the influence of a methodical and persistent education on the canine race, and, perhaps, eventually on other kinds of animals.

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and left hands ought to be quite easy, as, according to them, we are born ambidextrous, and have only our own want of foresight, our own negligence, to thank for the incapacity of half of our two tools of manipulation. As a fact, normal society wastes, by want of use, 50 out of 100 of one of its powers, or at least 30 or 35 out of 100, if it is true (contrary to what some specialists affirm) that the left side of the body is slightly inferior from well-known primary causes. Helen Keller, naturally inclined by her condition to think on such subjects, was astonished at the neglect of a part of our natural forces. It is assuredly a paradoxical fact that we are accustomed to treat the right hand as our only authorised servant, qualified and worthy of confidence, to the point of considering as abnormal, almost as deformed, a "left-handed" person who can make use equally of the right and the left.

But this phenomenon is still more striking if we examine the parts assigned to certain of our senses, considering that which they play in the activity of incomplete individuals. No doubt it is easier to train two senses than five, since a great part of the force and, perhaps, all the properties of the three atrophied senses pass into the two survivors. But still, what

experience have we to show that if we exact from *each* of our five faculties what is demanded of the two last faculties of the blind and deaf mutes, we shall not obtain a much richer return from them than the present?

Helen Keller assures us that there are many tangible things that persons who see are not aware of, and that contact with them, which they disdain, reveals a quantity of things they ignore. She can distinguish the different variety of flowers by their tissue, and can make an abstraction of their form and scent—that one is of a quality of velvet, another of satin, another of silk or gauze, and so on. (1)

What gardener, even the most expert, has ever thought of this mode of discernment, and why is he deprived of it? Simply because he has only learnt to make use of his eyes, or his sense of smell, for recognising and classifying the members of the vast floral family.

Take a blind person who plays in one of those games which consist in seeking for some hidden

(1) Following the same idea Helen Keller expresses the difference existing between the hardness of rock and that of wood. "The one is to the other what the male bass voice is to the contralto."

object without any other direction than the sound of a piano, graduated according as the seeker is near or far from the object. While the people who can see, hesitate more or less and sometimes give up the search, the blind person, at the first indications of the piano, goes straight to the invisible object. Could we not train our hearing to the same degree of acuteness, if we deliberately made use of it, as the blind person does instinctively?

To return to the cultivation of touch: we scarcely ever find critics who, in appreciating the merits of statuary, appeal to a sense other than sight—that is to the most superficial of all, according to the testimony formulated by Diderot in his "*Lettre sur les Aveugles.*" "The eye is enough!" cry the authorised arbiters of plastic art. Now, Helen Keller, that rare human document, whom we must always consult in such matters, is not satisfied by merely believing the word of the Italian artist, Lorenzo Ghiberti, who said of an admirable antique marble: "Its most exquisite beauties cannot be perceived by the sight, but by the most minute manual inspection." She uses her own experience in analyzing the æsthetic qualities of a Venus de Milo, by feeling the voluptuous

curves with her hands, and describes thus, after the same criterion, the Victory of Samothrace: "headless goddess, who, under my fingers, and with the help of my imagination, becomes an incarnate and living power, swept by the sea-winds, containing in her wings all the splendour of conquest." She makes us feel how much these masterpieces of marble or bronze have still to reveal to the normal being who will not limit himself exclusively to their lineal appearance, but who, with a hand constantly helping him, will explore their surfaces, their folds, the secrets of their substance.

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But Miss Sullivan's (or rather Mrs. Macy's) pupil has still other reasons, as we shall see, for assuring us that if a fairy were to ask her to choose between the gift of sight and that of touch, she would choose the latter.

The intensity of her manual perceptions gives her the aptitudes of a *thought reader* who can guess at your actual emotions by the slightest trembling of your hands, and can seize, by the most unconscious tremor, the illumination of the thought which has just crossed your mind. Further still, the

pressure of a hand, gives her a prompt and complete idea of the character of its owner, of his mental worth, his habits, and often of his profession. There are hands which reveal goodness, self-importance, or stupidity, or which express indifference, or joy, or foretell grief and disaster. And for our blind and deaf mute, they are all faces which show their secrets, and show them much more clearly than physiognomies proper by which we alone can judge, since dissimulation is easy to our faces, while our hands, which we do not control, speak without reticence by the degree of their temperature and their elasticity, and the irrepressible play of their nerves and muscles.

"I am a palmist in my own way," cries Helen Keller. "I will tell you your fortune, but my way has nothing in common with necromancy."

It appears then, as if a scientific combination, more or less exact, might be made between palmistry and the chiromancy which has always been considered as a childish superstition, or charlatanism. The difference between Helen Keller's instinctive appreciation and the arbitrary system of an Anaxagoras, or a Desbarolles, is immediately apparent. These made their deductions solely from the conformation

and dimensions of the hand and the lines of the palm. They were only concerned with visible matter, with the body of our "executive" organs. Helen Keller, in agreement with the doctor who confirmed her physiological diagnosis of pulsation, interprets the manifestations of interior life. She reads, one may say, the movements of the mind without reference to its exterior aspect, of which she, by her affliction, has only an imperfect idea. With her, manual thought-reading (relative of course, for she has no pretentions to infallibility) is a phenomenon of positive telepathy. The fluid which travels from our brains to our extremities comes into contact with hers, and gives her, by a magnetism of great purity, information, approximately correct, on our state of mind, or our general inclinations, on the impulses which we obey, and will continue to obey in all time, if our organic inclinations do not vary at such or such moments of our career. All this by the extreme sensibility which her own hand owes to its education and its incessant activity. Why cannot the organs of touch in normal individuals, by the same application, become physiognomists as clairvoyant as this triply afflicted girl's ? Should we

not employ for the government of events and persons, anything which promises, or guarantees, a quicker and more profound knowledge of individuals between each other?

Certain *tours de force* which have perplexed us, or made us sceptic, may already be explained by the unexpected results of Helen Keller's tactile powers. Cumberland, the thought-reader, who came over from America some years ago, sought for and found with bandaged eyes any object hidden by a person who touched his hand during the search. He was, perhaps, less a skilful conjuror, than a sincere diviner, who worked by the help of touch, interpreted with the same jealous care as that of our blind and deaf mutes and strengthened by the momentary abdication of sight.

* * *

A recent event shows that in certain circles we are beginning to see the use which can be made of the faculty of discerning, through touch, the objects amongst which we move. The Minister of Arts and Sciences in Belgium conceived the idea of assembling at Brussels a meeting of the principal schoolmasters of the country and abroad, for the

exchange, publicly and comparatively, of their views on the improvements introduced in methods of teaching. Two statements were made which confirmed all the scientific research and educative efforts mentioned in this book. The first was by M. Claparède, professor at the University of Geneva. The substance of what he said was this: "Let us try not only to teach abnormal children, but to study them themselves, for even their deficiencies may give useful indications for the instruction of normal individuals. A malady discovered in the dissections of the brain may show what is left of one function when the others have been amputated or suspended."

M. Van Biervliet, professor at the University of Ghent, says: "In examining the senses in children, particularly those of sight and hearing, teachers and parents may gain useful ideas, many experiments might be made outside the school, in the family circle, *i.e.*, to handle an object with shut eyes, or to draw one without having seen it."

That is to say that, by the voluntary suppression of the gift of sight, one may learn the degree of acuteness of the child's other senses, and develop to a great degree a sense generally neglected up till now.

This proposition was practically realised by Helen Keller in her university studies. Not being able to see or repeat identically the geometrical figures traced on the board, she drew them on a cushion with wire threads, either rectangular or bent, thus substituting tangibility for visuality.

Thus the professors declare the secular fault of an education, which has up till now not taken into account the daily conditions of life, which pre-supposes that we are obliged, at all hours of the day or night and wherever we are, to go and come, to see and feel as if in full light, and this by the sole use of our eyes—our eyes condemned in so many circumstances to suspend their service.

* * *

Others more capable than I, may perhaps, go further and suggest other experiments for scientific advancement through analysis of the peculiar aptitudes which those may have who can see, speak, read, and listen solely by the use of their hands. The study of ærial waves and their conducting power has already resulted in marvellous inventions, which the careful examination of Helen Keller, and those like her, may help in extending still further. A

woman without ears or eyes, who can tell only by the sense of touch that a bee has flown in the room, or that there is produced in space something that we cannot perceive, but which warns her of an approaching storm—does not this woman seem to have been created expressly, to help us to fathom, more profoundly than we have done as yet, the mysteries of the ambient air? In the vibrations of the ether felt by her fingers there must be a collection of infinitesimal movements which escape the least trained of our senses, and whose discovery would be a new and considerable acquisition for science. These invisible and almost imperceptible currents can be felt by Helen's hand, and she must be able to teach us to feel them and to use them to their remotest limits.

Others, perhaps, have already thought of this. Her celebrated compatriots, Graham Bell and Edison, have known Helen Keller from the first phases of her education and are keenly interested in her. The gradual stages of her education have not been without interest to the great aviators of her country, the Brothers Wright. With Graham Bell, in 1893, she visited the exhibition at Chicago, "a true tangible kaleidoscope," and later the Falls of Niagara. She

frequented the laboratory of this great physician, and on the sands of *Bras d'Or* helped him in his experiments on the dirigibility of kites, by which he tried to understand the laws which would govern the future ærial ship. Who can tell what influence the manifestations of her tactile receptivity have not had on the inventor of the telephone and so many other vehicles of sound, and how far they will also influence other minds working at the solution of the most difficult problems of to-day and to-morrow?

* * *

This problem leads us to an episode in the existence of Helen Keller which all those who study the mechanism of the memory will find singularly suggestive. The frequency with which the cells of our brains will store ideas, words and phrases which are produced much later almost intact, has not yet found an explanation. The man who succeeds in solving the enigma will perhaps discover, at the same time, a sure method of supplementing a weak and defective memory by artificial means. He might be helped by recalling the following fact, well-known to those who have read the American girl's biography:

At the end of 1890, before her eleventh year, Helen had been very much struck by a description her governess had given her of the rich coloring of nature in autumn. She wrote in Braille, composing a little story called *King Frost*, and was encouraged by Miss Sullivan to dedicate it to M. Agnonos, Dr. Howe's successor at the Perkins Institute.

"The good King Frost sent one day to his old and excellent friend Santa Claus, his troop of joyous little fairies, carrying heavy vases and jugs full of gold pieces and rubies to distribute to young children. The little fairies quickly grew tired, and, besides, they were fonder of play than of work, and so they soon forgot King Frost's express command, 'Make haste! no playing truant!'

"They therefore stopped in a great forest to rest and gather nuts. For fear of thieves they began to climb the highest trees to place their precious vases in safety, while they gathered their nuts and played at hide and seek. But they had forgotten His Majesty, King Sun—all-powerful at mid-day. This rival and opponent of King Frost soon found out the vases of gold and precious stones amongst the leaves. He began, with spiteful pleasure, to melt them with

the heat of his rays. Soon, from all sides, there came pouring down streams of liquid, staining with gold and purple the green of the leaves. The little fairies at last became aware of the drops of iridescent rain falling on their noses. Seized with panic at this unexpected result of their disobedience, they fled, hiding in the deepest undergrowth to escape the anger of King Frost. Uneasy at the long absence of his servants, he went to look for them in the forest, marked the disaster at once, and guessing the cause, filled the wood with the burst of his fury. But just then a troop of children arrived, who, on seeing the leaves so sumptuously coloured, cried out in their delight, clapped their hands, and began to pluck the leaves, to take back those marvellous bouquets to their homes. This spectacle pacified King Frost. He said to himself that his treasures were not wasted since they gave so much happiness, even in the liquid state. And from that time his favourite game has been to paint the leaves in autumn. 'If they are not made of gold and rubies, of what, I ask myself, are they made? What do you think?'"

Such is, roughly, the poetic little story which Helen Keller dedicated as a birthday gift to the

Director of the Perkins Institute. M. Agnonos was so touched by it that he had it printed and published in one of the bulletins of the Institute. But the joy of the little girl and her governess were of short duration. They were told one day that *King Frost* was simply a repetition, with a few variations, of *Frost Fairies*, a fragment of a collection of stories published before Helen Keller's birth by the American authoress, Margaret Canby, called *Birdie and his Friends*, and which was now out of print. Helen Keller was thus formally accused of barefaced plagiarism, connived at by Miss Sullivan, who was supposed to exaggerate as far as possible in the eyes of the public the wonderful results of her teaching. She was filled with despair, bewilderment and shame, and her tears flowed unceasingly. Miss Margaret Canby herself tried to console her and assure her that her version was superior to the original conception, Helen's being more concise, and showing here and there beauties of expression which were missing in the original fairy story. But things were not allowed to rest. M. Agnonos had the little girl brought before a tribunal of masters who could draw from her

nothing but this declaration: "I swear that I do not remember ever having read Miss Canby's story, and that my copy, since it is a copy, is as inexplicable as it was involuntary." On her side Helen and Miss Sullivan, helped by Graham Bell, moved heaven and earth to try to discover in what way Miss Canby's story could have reached the child's consciousness, and become imprinted on it so deeply and at the same time so unconsciously(1).

At the end of some months the facts came to light. Helen had spent a part of the summer of 1888, at Brewster, with a friend of her family, Mrs. Hopkins. This lady remembered certain days when she had amused the child by reading stories and legends. Was the *Frost Fairies* among them? Mrs. Hopkins did not remember, but this hypothesis was a likely one, as there was no other explanation possible for the annoying occurrence. In any case, the scrupulous integrity and modesty of Miss Sullivan

(1) If the child had read the story herself, it goes without saying that she could only have done so from a copy printed *in relief*, as were all the books for her use, or existing at the Perkins Institute for the blind. It was proved at the enquiry that Margaret Canby's story had never been printed in this form.

having *a priori* put her complicity out of the question (1), Helen's good faith was now equally beyond a doubt. It remains for us to discover how the simple affiliation of ideas, suggested by an accidental conversation on the splendours of autumn, had mechanically revived at the end of three years, and from beneath a layer of forgetfulness the relatively complicated story had grown. We do not yet know. The incident brings us to the threshold of memories, or to the threshold of the subconscious.

The incident is more curious from the fact that at the time when Helen was told the history of *The Frost Fairies* by the intermediary of another's fingers she was only eight years old, that is, reckoned by the calendar, but scarcely two years old by mental existence. When one remembers that up to her seventh year she was in almost a savage state, uneducated, ignorant of all meaning of words, of ideas, of the sensations they represent, and that she had hardly lived for more than four years in effective possession of her faculties when she produced a literary composition reflecting, as a mirror reflects,

(1) Miss Sullivan was always most diffident about any publicity made of her miracle.

a story heard more than thirty months before, that is at the very beginning of her thinking life. Even supposing that in writing *King Frost* she had committed by fraud a theft coldly premeditated, as do some writers ripe in years, but not in scruples, we should still have a proof of the remarkable feats of which memory is capable, even in the first phase of its activity.

But, since all suspicion of conscious imitation is set aside, there still remains the fact that the human brain, although its development may have been retarded by circumstances as terrible as blindness, deafness and aphasia, receives from infancy indelible impressions which may remain for long, or for ever, unawakened, but only need an opportunity for them to awaken out of their torpor and come to life again, dragged from the bottom of some dim drawer of the memory, like a treasure long forgotten or mislaid.

Helen Keller's is an extreme case. One can scarcely compare it with the antithesis, *i.e.*, with the phenomenon of total loss of memory, where an individual, who has a perfect lucidity of mind and a perfect capacity for the present time and the future, has forgotten all his antecedents, from what country

or town he came, what he did, even the name he has borne since his birth, and which he has pronounced, or heard pronounced, every day. This complete paralysis of the sources of memory is a phenomenon equally extreme, but less rare than one would think. During the last twenty years there have been, especially in England, sufficient examples to inspire a well-known writer with a curious subject for romance, in which he paints the abyss that the loss of memory may create in the midst of a human life. The comparison of these cerebral accidents, so diametrically opposed, is not made, merely to instil in our minds an attitude of indulgence, or reserve, towards certain apparent plagiarisms which are only pure automatic reflexes. Let us probe the case to the bottom and it will help us to penetrate down to the general cause of memory, its weakness, its loss, and regulate, perfect and protect the mechanism, at once so simple and fragile, of the intellectual clock where our knowledge is so faithfully registered.

A step further, and beyond the region of memory, we enter that of its near neighbours—sleep and dreams, which, according to some physiologists, are only an unconscious prolonging of memory, working

this time without the help of our will. And here, again, what resources are open in the future for the scientist who endeavours to learn how the chimeric images of the night appear to those who know nothing of the realities of daylight!

Helen has told us that in the early times of her education many scientific men questioned her as to the nature of her dreams. This astonished her. She could not understand what interest they could have for them. She understands so well to-day, that she has devoted two chapters in one of her books to this subject. They have an anecdotal rather than a speculative character, and for this reason they offer solid grounds of study to physiologists and psychologists. We may judge by a few examples:

During her sleep she once thought that she held a little child in her arms, during an insurrection, and that she cried out vehemently, "imploring the soldiers not to massacre the Jews." She was living, in her dream, in the terrible scenes of insurrection in India, and the drama of the French Revolution, a reflex of readings which had excited her imagination the evening before. One evening she heard a suggestion that the countries of temperate climates might

be invaded by arctic ice. She dreamed afterwards that the ocean was frozen over, and blockaded by ice in the middle of summer, and that all navigation between the East and the West was suspended, and that the birds, perished with cold, came into all the houses to find shelter. Charming illusions, grotesquely impossible spectacles, nightmares, accompanied by terrible falls into space, hallucinations, when she struggled with an overwhelming feeling of helplessness against blind and unpitying forces—everything that the imagination, after it has broken the bonds of reason, conjures up of delicious, hideous, or absurd fantasies in normal beings, all passed through the brain of this blind and deaf mute during her sleep. In the analysis of her fugitive nocturnal sensations we find all of our own, even to the impression which the remembrance of a dream leaves behind it, even to the feeling of deception which we all experience on waking from a dream interrupted by our return to consciousness just at the most interesting moment, like the breaking off of a story to be continued in the next number of a magazine. In her truthfulness and clear-sightedness Helen Keller says she cannot always guarantee the fidelity of her remembrance of a dream,

since, with the best faith in the world, the person awakened inevitably brings to the vague creations of sleep the corrections demanded by reason, always opposed as it is to the wild incoherence of a mind separated from the will, "flying before the wind like a ship without rudder or compass." Here, again, what a striking likeness between her and us!

But this likeness, in certain cases, goes further still. During her dreams Helen hardly ever has to feel her way. She comes and goes without a guide, across the most crowded streets under the most difficult conditions. She is sufficient to herself. She listens, she speaks, she is spoken to, without the help of the language of fingers. It seems to her as if she bathes in a sea of dazzling light, which she compares to a wonderful jewel, a pearl "made of dew and fire, where the soft whiteness of the lily mingles with the shades of a thousand roses." And she expresses her delight at being so enriched if only during a brief sleep; "for then," she says, "my soul puts on its winged sandals and joins the multitude of the blessed."

This blind and deaf mute thus brings us a fresh and profoundly touching proof of the sublime supremacy

of mind over matter. She sleeps. Her body is inert, or reduced to the minimum of movement, and that movement purely mechanical. The sense of smell is only awake in her in a passive degree. The sense of touch, her indispensable and inseparable factotum, is in the same state of passivity, and as she has not the use of her eyes (and the visual sense—every specialist agrees in this—plays the principal part amongst the mysterious servants of dreams), the sleep of Helen ought to be, according to all logical reasoning, a sort of catalepsy, a total unconsciousness, almost like death. But, on the contrary, it opens all the doors of life which, waking, are closed to her. The fragmentary human being of an hour ago has now become, by the magic of repose, a complete creature, who can walk unaided, who is bathed in light, who, seeing, hearing and acting, assists in all the events of the universe produced by her dreams. When her mutilated body is inert and powerless, her spiritual self breaks its last bondage, arises and soars, free, radiant, intoxicated, above the flesh.

Surely a life's work might well be spent in the elucidation of this amazing phenomenon? Whole volumes have been devoted to the visions of opium

or hashish smokers, to be explained by the excitation of the nerves which it produces. A profound study of the dreams of a Helen Keller, or a Marie Heurtin, is a hundred times more justifiable—especially as this strange physiological and psychical state is almost unexplored, at least with us. One knows that in the Far East it has been systematically sifted and partially understood by medical science from a pathological point of view, which, through direct observation, has more or less accurately established the relations existing between dreams, the action of the heart and the four other principal organs. But there might be a further extension of these investigations, if, for instance, a certain number of experimental subjects were to communicate to medical men and psychologists their adventures in the land of dreams, and the circumstances in which they were placed the evening before.

We hardly take into account the fact that the condition of sleep in many individuals occupies nearly half their life, and with all of us a third of it, owing to tacit laws deciding that the day is divided into three portions of eight hours, one of which is devoted to absolute repose for the renewing of our life by a

periodic suspension of its powers. To treat as a negligible quantity a fraction of our existence so important and so enigmatic, is a mistake which science and human consciousness will no doubt rectify. What useful assistance in gaining an insight into the unknown might be afforded by brains so quick and so communicative as those of this American girl, whose peculiar circumstances fit her for an intimate analysis of her sensations and ours?

The sleep of Laura Bridgman is also full of dreams, since, after being told of these phenomena, she questioned a companion about her dreams and related her own. Laura avowed, before Helen Keller did, to have *seen* during her dreams what was invisible to her in the daytime. Her teachers, without directly contradicting her, received this information with reserve, and attributed it to a possible confusion of the senses and their respective functions. If Laura had had the faculty of introspection and eloquence of expression of Helen Keller she would, no doubt, have been able to convince them of the reality of a fact attested by the latter in a quite undeniable manner.[1]

(1) We shall see in the following chapter that I had occasion to question Marie Heurtin on her dreams, and that her reply was most interesting.

In any case, Dr. Howe assigned to Laura Bridgman what the "Brownism" system has qualified as a sixth sense; the sense of muscular resistance which made her able to guide herself with surprising ease. In spite of her blindness, she would go straight to a window, or door, without hesitation or feeling her way, and stop at once at the desired destination without running against any obstacle, and she could also establish the relative position of objects with almost mathematical accuracy. This sense of dirigibility may be that which is assigned (not yet quite categorically) to certain animals, bats especially, whose precise nocturnal evolutions have inspired an inventor (after a close study of these animals) with the idea of an apparatus for automatically guiding ships in the fog, so as to avoid the smallest obstacles. Did this sense of direction in Laura arise from the permanent and highly developed sense of touch; and might it not become usual to all "outcasts of humanity" who are deprived of sight and hearing, and who could cultivate to a great degree all the forces which instinct and our organization have given us? This sense seems much less accentuated in Helen Keller, whose movements seem to lack confidence, perhaps because being

infinitely more intellectual than Laura, she has trained herself to extract from her gift of touch the maximum of mental fruit and not the maximum of physical properties.

It might perhaps have been found in a perfect state in Marie Heurtin if it had been methodically cultivated, and why, in her case again, should we not find the key to infinitely useful discoveries?

* * *

I can only suggest, in passing, the possibilities that the evolution of these three afflicted girls offer to philologists employed in searching out the sources of human language.

One can see, as living answers to these questions, primitive beings, seeking to express themselves otherwise than by signs or cries, and arriving by degrees at the oral designation of purely tangible objects, to the expression of non-material ideas and sentiments, under the form of images, materialising abstract things. It might be shown that Helen Keller, Laura Bridgman and Marie Heurtin, reduced as they were to the senses of touch and scent, exactly repeated the operation by which prehistoric man laid the first stone of our marvellous verbal edifice.

It is quite certain that the more frequently and more profoundly we study the abnormal cases of humanity, the better chance we shall have of gleaning some ideas which, if not original, have never got beyond the stage of theory and have been given up for want of practical proof. The set-back which one of the worst individual misfortunes may have on collective well-being is almost sufficient to explain or wipe away certain strange and cruel caprices of fate. In the moral order of things humanity is presented to us as benefitting by the drama of Golgotha. It is true that the Crucifixion, which has had such a striking effect on the imagination of the greater part of humanity, has done more for the propaganda of Christian morality than the most eloquent exhortations of rhetoric. In the physical, psychic and philosophic order of things one might be tempted to regard these blind and deaf mutes as victims specially designed to show us, at the price of their personal suffering, an inexhaustible series of mysteries, and to illumine little by little the dark recesses from which they have come by the help of the unsuspected revelations which they offer to our ignorance.[1]

(1) I should be sincerely grieved if certain fanatical experi-

Perhaps the mission assigned to these sons and daughters of the night, is that of bringing voluntarily, or involuntarily, into evidence the threads which unite all the things of creation. Thus considered, the sufferings of one martyr may sometimes reveal an appreciable amount of progress, the sight of a new pathway of the universe towards a better future. To extract from this sum of misery a sum ten thousand times stronger of power for good, would be, in any case, a second miraculous victory of man over the hostile forces which surround him, and which sow snares in his pathway to happiness.

menters, those, for instance, who practice vivisection, should interpret this remark as an encouragement to their "well-intentioned" atrocities. I do not mean that martyrs should be created in cold blood in any degree of life, but only that a benefit to the general good, might be drawn from those who exist—and that they themselves—(the case, I think, of Helen Keller)—might find some consolation in the knowledge of their utility to the human race.

CHAPTER VI

WITH THE CHILDREN OF THE MIRACLE

THE VISITS OF MADAME GEORGETTE LEBLANC-MAETERLINCK TO HELEN KELLER. THE VISIT OF THE AUTHOR TO MARIE AND MARTHE HEURTIN. THE DIFFERENCES OF THE EDUCATION AT BOSTON AND LARNAY. CHARITY IN TWO LATITUDES.

Before bringing my conclusions to an end I will introduce a kind of parenthesis which will bring home to my readers what science and charity have done to lighten, or rather to heal, these cases of extreme misery.

An account of the visits made by Madame Georgette Leblanc-Maeterlinck to Helen Keller in America, and by the author of this book to Marie and Marthe Heurtin in Poitou, should, logically, have appeared at the beginning of these pages. But the demonstration which it was their object to make, and the results they hoped to show, are better taken in this rational order. For it is natural that the proof should follow and not precede the proposition. Now

Mr. MACY. HELEN KELLER. Mme. GEORGETTE LEBLANC-MAETERLINCK.

that all has been told of the results obtained by the teachers of the blind and deaf mutes, incredulity will no doubt be felt, especially by those readers who have heard for the first time of these cases. It is, therefore, essential to produce direct evidence to establish the truth of the facts related.

I have been warned of this necessity—as a first paper on Helen Keller which I published a few years ago at Brussells, brought a smile of incredulity to some lips. In spite of the literature already existing that pretended to confirm the facts, there was a small proportion of intelligent people who on *a priori* grounds deemed it absolutely incredible that the innumerable obstacles in her path should be overcome and result in a mass of such wide and varied knowledge. Without going so far as to say that Helen Keller was a myth, one writer hazarded the remark that a blind and deaf mute, described as a sort of *Pica della Mirandola* in petticoats, was only the product of the habitual gross exaggeration of the compatriots of Barnum, and that the Europeans who accepted this extraordinary tale of her transformation were the dupes of a poetic fancy.

My earnest wish to go to the United States and

see the truth for myself having been disappointed for many reasons, I was delighted by the news that Mme. Georgette LeBlanc Maeterlinck would take advantage of her projected journey to Boston in the beginning of 1912, to pay a visit to Miss Sullivan's pupil. No one was better able to judge of the truth than this great artist, so observant, so thoughtful, and of such acute intelligence and quick sensibility. She had been prepared for her visit by the paper to which I have alluded, and of which the author of *La Vie des Abeilles* had said, that it opened up the most bewildering perspectives he had ever known.

Madame Maeterlinck had been a fortnight in Boston when I received a cablegram, signed by her, as follows: "I have just left Helen Keller, and am perfectly enchanted." Almost at the time this book appeared, she proposed to publish in America an account of the three afternoons she had spent with Helen Keller at Wrentham Villa, some 50 miles from Boston, where the remarkable blind and deaf mute lives with Mr. and Mrs. Macy (formerly Miss Sullivan).

Mme. Maeterlinck was the first Frenchwoman Helen Keller had met. For this modern miracle had

escaped the eyes of Jules Huret and Paul Bourget during their travels across the Atlantic, from which they brought back such interesting observations. M. Louis Arnould, whom I have mentioned more than once, was the only writer in our tongue who had met Helen Keller at Wrentham, one day in the winter of 1907. His interview lasted for three quarters of an hour, when he conversed *orally* with the young woman in French, and came away with the impression "of a remarkable intelligence, saved from pedantry by an overflowing gaiety and joy of life."

The account which Mme. Georgette Leblanc Maeterlinck gave me personally is naturally richer in detail and more precise. Helen Keller, it appears, was prepared for the arrival in America of the great interpreter of *Pelléas and Mélisande*. For she reads, or rather has read to her, the daily papers to satisfy her craving for knowledge and her desire to participate in the life around her. When she heard that Madame Maeterlinck wished to come and visit her, she offered to spare her the trouble and to go herself to Boston. The offer was declined. It was infinitely preferable to see the celebrated

blind and deaf mute in her own surroundings and in the atmosphere in which her every-day life is passed.

When the visitor alighted from a motor car before the pretty rustic cottage, she walked down a garden full of shrubs, where the trees here and there, at the turn of a pathway for instance, were linked together with ropes. She learnt afterwards that the ropes were used as marks for Helen on the frequent strolls she took without any companion, walking fast, hardly feeling her way, and only using these artificial guides to avoid wandering out of the garden into the country. The villa was pretty and comfortable, without being encumbered with much furniture, and Mme. Maeterlinck soon found herself in the presence of a charming girl, who ran up to her and embraced her warmly. She was at first agreeably surprised at being face to face with a being so abnormal, and yet so like normal people: at being in the presence of a martyr whom one would suppose so different from ourselves, and whom one finds on near approach so very similar. A few minutes of close attention altered this first impression to a very painful one. Mme. Maeterlinck became aware that

the clear and frank expression with which she had welcomed her was the fixed and rigid stare of a sphinx. Helen's eyes were globes of painted glass, hiding the poor empty blind orbits under an appearance of life and brilliancy. And her speech—(for Helen had spoken to Mme. Maeterlinck vocally and in French)—was artificial and forced, and struck her as infinitely pathetic. "With her," said Mme. Maeterlinck to me, "I seemed to enter a gloom, where I could hardly breathe. I was so much oppressed that I brought away no distinct impressions, except at my second visit, when I had become accustomed to these painful conditions."

The blind and deaf mute, no doubt, felt nothing of the painful emotions that she aroused in her visitor. Her ardent exuberance bore witness, on the contrary, to the joy of a heroic nature in surmounting the formidable difficulties she feft herself capable of overcoming, one by one, by force of will. But her very expansiveness, and the work she had imposed on herself, displayed the tragic state of tension of a will engaged in almost superhuman effort, and excited in her visitor the kind of distress which agitates us on seeing the effort of a tight-rope walker tottering

over empty space—or to give Mme. Maeterlinck's own words, "It was like the struggle of a prisoner hurling himself against a barred door."

But these feelings disappeared as if by enchantment as soon as the visitor to Wrentham Cottage began to speak with Helen through the intermediaries of Mr. and Mrs. Macy, who traced in the girl's hand the words and questions of the European artist, and translated the replies to her. All the physical shortcomings vanished under the charm of her wonderful intellect. The first conversations were on a variety of subjects, which proved not only the high degree of culture of the blind girl, but what Mme. Maeterlinck termed "her wonderful intelligence," for she draws from every subject that she has mastered the most ingenious and often the most interesting ideas. Though her consciousness be enclosed in hermetically sealed walls, she gives out, through the narrow bars of her prison, light as plentiful and as bright as she has received. The principal conversations between Helen Keller and Mme. Maeterlinck were type-written by her secretary, and bear a better witness to this than I can do. It is enough to say here that the little animal, without

speech, without vision, without ears, whose education Miss Sullivan undertook twenty-five years before, appeared to a refined European to be one of the best educated and one of the most thoughtful and thoroughly fascinating specimens of humanity which civilisation can produce. She conversed with her visitor on familiar or abstruse topics with the same facility, the same power of comprehension and analysis, with the same passion for knowledge, and with the youthful, joyous enthusiasm of those entering on a life where each day is a new source of wonder. She expressed her views—very advanced, on the future of the rights of women and on political and economic Socialism. It goes without saying that, in comparing the philosophers and poets of America with those of Europe, she dwelt on the works of Maurice Maeterlinck. She recited from memory entire passages of the "Blue Bird," making remarks which showed how she had understood the most subtle pieces of symbolism. The visitor was convinced before the end of the first interview that Helen had not exaggerated in her books the divining power of her hand. "After pressing my hand some few times," said Mme. Maeterlinck,

"Helen told me the principal traits of my character, more exactly than many of my oldest friends."

The tone of her voice is still harsh and somewhat hollow, but the expression of her thoughts is always neat, wonderfully full of imagery, and infinitely poetical, without the least affectation, coming spontaneously from a sincere and impulsive nature. This "mute" girl speaks very slowly, with an interval between each syllable, but her diction is clear and perfectly intelligible. She is not much encouraged to use the oral mode of communication, firstly, for fear of exhausting her, and, secondly, because the language of touch is much more rapid. But it is never she, who refuses. On the contrary, all the time she can spare from her numerous studies, she devotes to practising her voice, as she nobly longs to give lectures on the most useful subjects to relieve cases of distress she knows of, or miseries from which she has herself been preserved. (1)

At the second visit Mme. Georgette Leblanc found her seated before her writing machine composing an article on "The Lower Depths: My unhappy brothers,"

(1) This ambition is already partly fulfilled. Helen Keller has lately addressed astonished audiences, who have applauded her.

an article which has since been printed, and whose frankly socialistic tendencies made a great stir in America; a sensation not unexpected, however, coming from one of nature's disinherited, who, by merely passing her hand over her artificial eyes, her deaf ears, or her throat, in revolt against its inertia, had conceived an immense pity for all the inequalities which the injustice of nature or the social organism have made in "the lower depths," as so many obstacles in the ascent to the first stages of a happy life. (1)

The work at the writing machine in which Mme. Maeterlinck found Helen absorbed, was her occupation every morning after she had dressed herself without help, and absorbed the essential part of the daily papers. When she is not writing or receiving visits she corresponds with her friends, or with publishers, or with the Institutes for the deaf and dumb, or the blind, of which she is the inspectress and the inde-

(1) Helen Keller might doubtless have simply given herself as an example of the magic possibilities of personal energy in men and women afflicted by fate at the beginning of their lives by saying: "See what I came from, and where my will has brought me." But she must have felt too deeply how greatly her liberation was due to the tender pity and devotion of others, not to understand the help which sympathy brings to individual energy; or to refrain from saying to the favourites of destiny: "Give help to these unfortunate people," and to the unfortunate: "Do not lose courage! You have more inherent strength than you think."

fatigable and profoundly judicious adviser—for who could have as intimate an acquaintance with infirmaty as she? In the afternoon she reads in her library, storing up all the ideas possible, both philosophic or æsthetic, or she enjoys her poets, Latin, English, French or German. Then she walks in the garden, or goes for excursions with Mr. and Mrs. Macy, and for her recreation at the end of the day she plays cards, or practices her vocal chords to achieve the conquest of speech.

The last visit of Mme. Georgette Leblanc to her American friend, to whom she was to remain always invisible, was the occasion of a particularly significant experience. The eminent artiste had said good-bye to Helen Keller without a thought of returning. She intended to sail three days later for Europe. But the disaster of the *Titanic* and other unforseen circumstances made her determine to postpone her departure for a week, and she returned unexpectedly to Wrentham and went to see Helen without being announced. Mrs. Macy's pupil had scarcely passed her fingers over her face, and pressed her hand, than she started with astonishment and delight. Tears of pleasure overflowed the artificial

eyes, and she exclaimed: "Mae—ter—linck! Mad—ame Mae—ter—linck!" It would be impossible to find a better example of this gift of vision and memory contained in her touch. Mme. Maeterlinck was profoundly moved even when, last spring, in the peace of the *Villa des Abeilles*, at Nice, she gave me an account of this last interview, and all the astonishment and admiration she had felt in the presence of this second Galatea.

Since this visit, Helen Keller has provided her observers with new subjects for wonder. She *sang* before an Otological Congress, organized by the Medical School of Harvard: *sang*, that is gave out modulated and melodious sounds which have always seemed impossible to the deaf and dumb. She has also carried on several telephonic conversations with people who imagined they were speaking to Mrs. Macy, the words being so clear and free from hesitation. Here again, we seem to border on the incredible, but no doubt more than one of my readers will have understood how such an apparently impossible thing could be accomplished. Let him picture to himself the blind and deaf mute, now a perfect mistress of speech, putting a question to the

transmitter, while her teacher, with the receiver at her ear, communicates the answer of the distant and invisible interlocutor to Helen's hand. Helen is thus informed of the reply and can continue her conversation with her distant friend. It seems to me that one's admiration for humanity which makes such an experiment possible must be sensibly increased.

* * *

Let us now leave America and convey ourselves to Poitou, to Notre-Dame de Larnay, to the French girl, Marie Heurtin, who was a blind and deaf mute from birth. I went there, one sunny day in last September, by an express train which, at every stopping place after we had passed Tours, took on board or discharged officers taking part in the great manœuvres on the plain of Poitou.

The plain of Larnay was a practice ground for artillery, which was perhaps the destination of some of these officers. Did the authorities select the neighbourhood of an establishment for the deaf and dumb on purpose, I wonder? If not, it was happily ordered by chance. From the station of Poitiers to Larnay there are 4 kilometers of dusty road, climbing upwards, and if one is in a hurry one must needs

drive both ways, through fields of grass or crops, bordered by lines of high poplars. This information is for the benefit of those scientific persons who would attempt the pilgrimage of 320 kilometers from Paris to a real miracle school. A complaint is made, not without reason, of the extreme rarity of the visits of physiologists or philosophers to Larnay, with the remark that Diderot, in his time, would have travelled by diligence from Paris to St. Petersburg to see one blind deaf mute who had been endowed with the means of communication with the outside world. But, at least, the religious institution which has thus endowed Marie Heurtin and which is now endeavouring to do the same for her sister, Marthe, has been spared the application of the law on associations and congregations, on account of the magnificent services rendered to humanity for more than three quarters of a century. Scientific professors, drawn here by a praiseworthy curiosity, should first of all inform themselves as to the cases of Laura Bridgman and Helen Keller, since the comparison between them and those treated at Larnay is instructive.

When I entered the gateway and crossed the court of the Poitevin institution, and approached the white

buildings, with slate roofs surmounted by a fine chapel spire, where hundreds of blind and deaf and dumb children are being educated, I tried to prepare myself for disillusion; for I knew that I should most certainly not meet such an accomplished woman as Helen Keller, in whom Mme. Maeterlinck had found an intellectual equal.

Marie Heurtin had had the disadvantage of never having seen or heard anything for one moment since her birth. She had lived in an absolutely savage state up to the age of ten years, had inherited the taint of conjugal consanguinity, and her parents, though honest, were very poor and almost illiterate. She could not, therefore, have hoped to approach the condition of the brilliant American who had inherited such talent at her birth and had enjoyed the additional advantage of a costly education. I simply expected to find that the humble daughter of the cooper of Vertou confirmed what her biographer had related, and, for my part, to be a witness of the powers latent in the most degraded beings on the earth, and which the genius and goodness of men are capable of raising from the depths of their squalor.

Before I saw Marie Heurtin, the superior of Notre-Dame de Larnay told me two things which I did not know. Sister Sainte Marguerite, Marie's teacher, had died two years before, and since then, the institution had taken little Marthe Heurtin, aged now ten years, who had also come into the world, like her sister, deaf, dumb and blind, and who, it was hoped, could be educated like her. I was, then, to be introduced to the miraculous education in two stages —to the education when finished, and to the education just beginning. The astonishing results were revealed to me as soon as the very simple and dignified superior had introduced me into the little schoolroom reserved for Marie and Marthe, for their new teacher (whose modesty and a recent conventual regulation forbids mention of her name), and for an assistant who is simply deaf and dumb, and replies on her fingers to any signs made to her by the triply afflicted. As I entered, the two young girls, who knew of my approach by the vibrations of the atmosphere, came up to me, taking my hands in theirs with a kind of feverish joy and seeming to ask them questions, stopping now and then to make an expressive sign to the deaf and dumb assistant, after which

they returned to complete by touch their acquaintance with the newcomer.

What struck me most was the wonderful vitality of their brains, particularly in the case of the younger girl. They overflowed with curiosity, and were eager to communicate with the immense "unknown," of which I represented at the moment a small fragment, in their little corner of the great philanthropic asylum.

I felt a kind of vague humiliation when I considered that they could make themselves understood by certain expressive gestures, such as that of smoking a cigarette or a pipe, while I possessed no form of language which could help me to communicate with their blank vision, their closed ears. I was for them an absolute stranger, and yet at the end of a few minutes, by the aid of their agile fingers, as indefatigably active and alive as the eyes and ears of normal people, they had arrived at a completer and truer idea of my personality than I could have had of theirs, had I not previously been told of their misfortune. Marie guessed my age with absolute accuracy by the shape of my hand, and she summed up my psychic disposition by one adjective, which, doubtless, was to the analysis of a being like Helen Keller what

the drawing of a little child is to the finished work of an artist, but still, was none the less a striking proof of divination on the part of a young girl bereft of any means of direct perception.

Her little sister, with a piece of chalk in her hand, went straight to a black board hanging on a wall, laid her left hand on it horizontally, and guided her right hand by it, to keep as straight a line as possible. She wrote in the letters of our alphabet, in absolutely clear writing, the words: "Bonjour, monsieur, je suis très contente de vous saluer," then "Monsieur est grand, monsieur est mince." Even admitting that these phrases might have been suggested by the teacher, they are still a wonderful mechanical performance on the part of a child, less equipped some months earlier than a chicken in a farmyard to express anything in the world. But I can affirm that the action, and all that it implies of acquisition and reflection, were entirely spontaneous.

Other experiments followed. In a frame hanging on the wall were tiny reproductions in wood, metal, or in fabric, of utensils, animals, and objects of all kinds, to teach the little beginner the form of things in general; and near it, in raised metal, were maps in

relief, of France, Europe, and the two hemispheres. I asked Marie to point out to me a series of countries, or towns, changing suddenly from one to another. After placing her finger first on Paris, her hand touched successively, without hesitation, every place I had mentioned, and she showed me also, in Loire-Inférieure, the situation of her native village.

The younger girl opened a cupboard and took from it a pair of stockings she had knitted, and put them into my hand with the eager desire to be complimented. The elder sat before the window, and, having fixed a thread, began to make a fishing-net, destined for sale with many other products made at the Larnay Institution to a contractor of marine stores. (1) And I thought of a recent definition explaining the superiority of man over animals. Man toils unceasingly beyond his necessities. Abstract or concrete, he bends it to his will. Matter, even his dreams, are as clay in his hands and he makes them minister to his present or future needs, (2) or his most fleeting

(1) Notre Dame de Larnay educates among its deaf mutes many basket makers, and from the blind, who have cultivated their fineness of ear, it prepares many musicians, especially organists, piano tuners, &c.

(2) For example, the Chinese begins to make his coffin when he is quite young. One may object that the hymenopteron that

fancies; whereby he has become lord of the world—over the ants, the bees, the spiders, and the beavers, those busy builders whose never varying work is dictated by the needs of the moment and formed from inert subject-matter.

Marie continued her work, showing an ambidextrous faculty; a natural gift, no doubt, to anyone who depends entirely on the sense of touch, but which faculty, I repeat, might be imparted to normal human beings by encouraging early practice. She sat before a typewriter (a machine which she had learnt to use in less than an hour), and produced with very little hesitation a sentence which was dictated to her. With the help of another machine she produced some lines in Ballu writing, where the letters are formed by projecting points, which exactly trace the outline of the letters. Then she repeated the same signs on the *pointing* machine of the Braille system, which

paralyses his victim shows a kind of foresight when he maims his prey and makes it helpless without killing it, in order to have fresh meat for a future meal; and it may also be said that the *ju jutsu* of the Japanese athletes is only an imitation of this anatomical operation. But even if men have borrowed something from the hymenoptera, the reverse is not the case. Animals have only imitated the most rudimentary movements of man, and have apparently never penetrated into the motive of his gestures.

produces combinations in relief, similar to a text with our alphabet, which the blind can read with their fingers. This last work, and the manufacture of fishing-nets, is Marie's principal occupation. Each word, each phrase, each chapter of a book which she thus transposes integrally is dictated on the fingers. The books are made, not only for her companions in misfortune, but also for the numerous afflicted persons in the superior condition, that is—only deprived of sight. The creation of a whole library of these white books, which circulate the thoughts of authors amongst the blind by the simple raising of paper, is largely the work of this poor girl, condemned by nature to an isolation and a uselessness as absolute as that of an animal born on a desert and unapproachable rock. One is disposed to think of this double process as very slow and very laborious—this transmission of a text by manual signs, and the reproduction of the same text by the imprinting on the leaves of a copy book. It is, however, as rapid as oral dictation for type-writing or manuscript to a normal secretary. The touch of the blind and deaf mute is as quickly receptive as our ears. They absorb a word, part of a sentence, and often an entire

MARTHE HEURTIN writing on the blackboard.

MARIE and MARTHE HEURTIN playing dominoes.

phrase, if it is written or spoken all at once, without losing time by separating it orthographically, letter by letter; for instance—they understand as a whole these five syllables, "Je vous remercie" without mentally spelling the letters "J-e v-o-u-s," &c. Besides (Helen Keller has explained to us) people deprived of sight and hearing perceive at once, without dividing mentally, the same phrase fingered on the hand, just as our sense of hearing takes in a melodic theme without being pre-occupied by the successive notes making up the whole.

I did not hear Marie speak *orally*, and I believe I am right in saying that it is a painful means of expression for her, and that it has been generally thought almost impossible and by no means necessary for the deaf and dumb: at the present time its utility is being recognised, not only to make possible a communication between the afflicted and the normal who do not know the language of the fingers, [1] but also for developing the respiratory organs, which are apt to become dangerously atrophied by want of employment. On the other hand,

[1] I have read of a case of atrophy in which the patient had a glove made, containing in the palm, an alphabet in relief

I heard the efforts of little Marthe (more ambitious than her sister) to conquer her natural lack of vocal power. She read aloud to me two or three fables printed in a white book, while I followed the text in ordinary print. Instead of the usual vocal sounds, it was a kind of laborious gurgle much like the sound of a liquid falling from a bottle with the cork only partly removed. This succession of formless and yet uniform noises had more the effect of a gargle in the throat than of the action of the vocal chords. Although I followed with extreme attention the text before me, it was at first impossible to find even an approximate echo of the meaning in what I heard: it was almost terrifying in its effort to convey a meaning while remaining incoherent. If I had not feared discouraging this cruelly earnest attempt, I should have put my hand over the heroic little mouth, and asked her to stop, as much for her sake as

with its translation into the ordinary alphabet, so that anyone could converse manually with him. Another went about with a little picture of the two alphabets in relief, side by side, with the same object. These are ingenious inventions which should generally be used, as also a little object invented in England to be used in an assembly of the deaf, dumb and blind for communicating to them the words of a lecturer, a preacher, or a professor.

for mine. But the child went on and on undeterred, and at last I was able to seize a word or two more clearly articulated. It made me think of feeble little birds who had somehow escaped from their cage that had been left open for a moment, and I seemed to catch a glimpse of the day when others would learn to copy them and follow them out, until the whole flock of words would take wing for liberty and space. I then understood the immense struggle that Helen Keller had been engaged in for years, with the difficulties of speech, the magnitude of her victory, and the glory of those who had helped her. And at the same time I felt confidence in the ultimate success of this gracious child of ten years whose voice fought with such energetic resolution against the gag that choked it. Whether, like her elder, the American girl, she succeeds in tearing off the last shreds of the terrible obstacle, or not, she will succeed in any case in overcoming the greater part of her fatality, and will have given us, like Helen Keller, an example of courage far more important than the actual result.

I had neither the time nor the intention to question Marie on the subject of her general instruction.

I had been sufficiently informed before my arrival at Larnay as to its general scope: some knowledge of geography and arithmetic, a small amount of history, a general idea of the chief elements of organisation of the physical world, and, above all, the knowledge of all that a careful religious education implies. Her teacher, in reply to one of my questions, told me that the sense of direction, so developed in Laura Bridgman, is almost absent in the elder of the two blind and deaf mutes at Larnay. She can only walk without feeling her way, in the parts of the Institute which are quite familiar to her, where she meets objects of contact which she knows well. I asked the young girl to tell me something about her dreams, as they might be interesting to compare with those of Helen Keller. She said she dreamed very often, and related one of her nocturnal visions to me. She thought she was walking towards Poitiers, which she often did, with some companions and Sister Sainte Marguerite. At the turn of the road was a church. They went in, but the church was full of armed soldiers who were evidently filled with the worst intentions. Marie

was much frightened and woke at that moment with a start.[1]

Did she see the troop of soldiers, their uniforms, their bayonets, their faces?

"No," she answered. "Sister Sainte Marguerite, speaking to my hand, told me they were there, after telling me in the same way that we were going into the house of God." Then to confirm decisively what she said, she went to her writing machine and rapidly composed these words—"I never see with my eyes when I dream.—Signed, Marie Heurtin."

Does it follow from this, that Helen Keller, whom we have seen in possession, during her sleep, of all the normal faculties, is gifted with a higher power of inventive imagination, is a creator in fact of what she can guess? or is it that her nineteen months of infancy and complete existence left traces of light, sound, movement and rumours of life, an indelible memory which reconstitutes objects and events mechanically, automatically, when the body is at rest? If science can decide this question, what light it will

(1) It is probable that this dream coincided with the supression in France of illegal associations, no doubt described to Marie when expulsion seemed to threaten the Soeurs de la Sagesse.

throw on the hour of the birth of human consciousness and memory!

Just before leaving the institution at Larnay, I asked Marie to tell me the time. She drew from her waist belt a little watch specially made for her with raised figures, and answered, "Ten minutes to four." A question arose naturally out of the military aviation experiments then being made at the grand manœuvres. Had the elder of the two girls any knowledge of the magnificent efforts then being made for the conquest of the air? Her teacher assured me that she had understood perfectly the theoretic explanations of aviation, and that they intended taking her, on the first possible occasion, to a flying machine, so that she might get a concrete idea by touching it. I asked Marie if she would like to make an excursion in one.

"Oh no," she cried, "it would be too dangerous for anyone who can neither see nor hear: I would not risk it." Hear she made a sign signifying a fall through the air.) "A motor car is different. I have been in one twice. One glides as if on a carpet. But, all the same, I should like very much to touch an aeroplane."

A letter which she wrote to me some days later,

and which will be found at the end of the book, with a facsimile of a part of the original in the Ballu characters, shows the lasting impression which this part of our interview had made on her. The impression I took away from Larnay is unforgettable. Above all, the extraordinary vitality shown by these girls, so fearfully maimed at the outset, will justify better than any argument, the resolute and thoughtful cultivation of life. There was not a trace of melancholy on the thin face of Marie (she had grown thin during the last year or two), or on the fuller and rosier face of her little sister. On the contrary there was a constant smile on their lips and an extraordinary mobility in the eyelids; the extinguished and inexpressive eyes which sometimes gave the illusion of living organs affected by a squint. There was an evident optimism, creating a sort of atmosphere which seemed to say, "How good life is!"—an untiring animation of the face—a joyous and unwearying participation in action and thought, all evidence of what M. Bergson calls "*l'élan vital.*"

Medical science can perhaps explain this phenomenon which struck me—the almost icy temperature of the two girls' hands; these hands which were, more-

over, so exceptionally active, and in which resided all the strength, the pulsations, the energy of the destroyed senses. But one can answer, in any case, for the intensity of the flame which burns under the poor bodily shell of these children of the miracle, and protest against the curses which the difficulties of existence so often draw from the less wretched. In the persons of Marie and Marthe, who had entered Notre-Dame de Larnay in the state of wild animals, is verified the imaginary tale of M. François de Curel in his *Fille Sauvage*, unless the dramatic-philosopher has simply transposed on the scene, with all the vividness of his art, the history of Marie Heurtin, a history so full of inspiration.

An example has been given me of a case almost the reverse of this, but equally striking. There was a man known by everyone in Paris—rich, happy, cultivated, brilliant—who, for twenty years, waited for death in almost complete solitude and with classical stoicism. He had been struck by paralysis, and deprived first, partially, then almost entirely, of movement. His hearing had grown so weak as to render conversation almost impossible; his power of speech gradually left him, and finally refused

all service. He saw objects only as if through a fog, which gradually thickened, and predicted a total darkness. A perfectly lucid brain alone remained to him, which, as the lantern at the top of a mast seems to watch the great waves slowly flooding the vessel, witnessed the successive atrophy of the senses. And his brain retained its perfect serenity, as the lantern retains its steady light, resisting the waves to the last.

If I had seen a trace of pessimism or discouragement in Marie Heurtin, who was regaining each day a little of what life originally refused her, I should have told her, for her comfort, something of this story of disintegration and ruin, to show her the persistence of this victim, in the love of life until its last moment. But I had no need to heal where there was no symptom of wound. Consolation must be kept for those less unfortunate than the blind and deaf mutes, who have, nevertheless, less patience with fate than they.

* * *

In religious circles in France and Germany Marie Heurtin's happy state of soul is attributed

to the influence of religious education. The certainty promised of infinite compensation in a future world makes the "cross" she bears in this world so light. It seems very likely, and I have already given it as my opinion that, if it is necessary to construct an imaginary heaven, we should certainly be warranted in doing so for the consolation of such miseries. And, moreover, I would never use a drop of ink in suggesting the shadow of a criticism of the work, in every sense admirable, undertaken and carried out at Larnay in a silence and with a simplicity which increases its merit.

If the pious French teachers believed it was their duty to limit systematically the intellectual development of Marie Heurtin to certain stages, which it was in any case a triumph to have attained, I again bow before their decision. Her social rank does not admit, in principle, of a brilliant and many sided culture; and, no doubt, the limitations of her natural aptitude are added reasons. Fiction and conjecture are perhaps preferable for minds only half educated and scarcely prepared, by their antecedents, for the shock of realities, or for discouraging speculations.

But if we recognise willingly and without reserve,

the salutary nature of the methods employed with regard to Marie and Marthe Heurtin, we have the right also to exact the same respect for those which have made of a Laura Bridgman, or a Helen Keller, what they have become. That respect has not been forthcoming up to the present.

There are—in Belgium and Germany, principally, not to mention France—writers who have expressed regret that, at the root of Helen Keller's brilliant existence, there has not been a "serious Christian education." This was not included in Dr. Howe's tradition. Being imbued with the theory of Jean Jacques and *Emile*, he dispensed with the teaching of any faith, especially in the first period of instruction. But why regret this, or blame him? Would Helen Keller's prodigious mental progress have been greater, if a religion, no matter what, had been the principal stimulant? Would the remarkable American blind and deaf mute (who belongs to the Swedenborgian sect, and believes in the propositions of her faith without making it the pivot and the mainspring of her thoughts), have shown herself more altruistic and benevolent than she is—more Christian in the ultra-ideal acceptation

of the word—if the same pains had been taken to teach her the doctrines of the Trinity or the Eucharist, as the precepts of pure and simple morality, the masterpieces of classic and modern poetry, the duties taught by political economy, the marvels divulged by natural history, and other exact sciences? Although she has read Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, as well as Spencer, Gustave Le Bon and Tolstoi, do not all the witnesses of her life allow that her moral health is at least as good as those blind and deaf mutes who know nothing of philosophy and metaphysics(1)? Only minds steeped in sectarianism ism will doubt the answer that must be given to such questions raised by their own objectors. The truth

(1) Some doubts have been raised on this point by the following criticism of a French writer: "The one cause for regret," he writes, "is that Helen Keller has not seen more of her family. She told me when I asked her that she had not met her mother for two years."

From a recent letter of Mr. Macy to Mme. Maeterlinck, which I have before me at the moment, it is clear that the author of this criticism has involuntarily made a mistake. Helen Keller's father died in 1896, while her mother visits her three children in turn, her married daughter Mildred, her son Philip, a young and clever engineer, and Helen herself. They live far apart, in separate towns, which accounts for the infrequency of their visits, which are, nevertheless, fairly regular and last a long time. This is sufficient proof of the loyalty of Helen Keller's feelings for her mother and her brothers and sisters, and it must be remembered that circumstances have of necessity tied her to the beloved instructress who has devoted her life to her help.

lies in this—that in each of the cases in point, the education of these triply afflicted people has been perfectly appropriate to its subjects and its objects. That of Marie Heurtin, condemned by circumstances to a limited horizon, and to spend her life in the quiet of a religious asylum, has been one developed by charity and wisdom. That of Helen Keller, a woman of genius, adapted to the highest enjoyment of a vast amount of knowledge, has answered not less adequately to the mental needs which it satisfied. I cannot believe that constant brooding on the possible joys of a life hereafter would have added in any way to her present happiness, to the graces of her character, or to her capacity for returning the devotion which she has received by an equal devotion to those who suffer. From the contrast between Larnay, the Perkins Institute and Wrentham Villa any impartial observer may perceive the necessity for adapting the education of each of the victims of nature to her natural tastes and capacities, and to the conditions of her surroundings.

This fact is of real importance, for a little egoistically, we have only contemplated, in the preceding chapters, the moral and material profit which the

human race may gain from the study of these misfortunes. There is, however, another point of view which we must not neglect—that of the means to employ for assuring and perfecting still further the well-being of the afflicted themselves. The sum total of the deaf and dumb persons in the world would constitute the equivalent of the population of a large town. The blind from birth, or blind from accident, would fill another. According to statistics, not quite complete, in 1909, the *known* cases of blind and deaf mutes (1) were then 338, eight cases being blind deaf and mute *from birth*. By an apparent paradox the number seems to increase with the advance of science, for these terrible organic deficiencies generally accompany diseases which formerly medical

(1) Although the statistics do not give the causes of these extreme cases treated to-day in six different establishments—Boston, New York, Venersborg (Sweden), Nowawes (Germany), Edinburgh, and the small number of blind and deaf mutes at Larnay—the principal causes seem to be marriages of consanguinity, at least as often as alcoholism or hereditary physical taint. This is proved by the relatively large number of the "triply infirm" in Scandinavian countries where intoxicating drink is strictly prohibited, and where marriages between cousins (first) or other near relations are exceptionally numerous. An enquiry might, perhaps, reveal some cases of this nature in the Island of Marken, in the gulf of Zuyder-zee, inhabited, it is known, by descendants of the Vikings, who, living in a distinct colony under the flag of the Netherlands marry exclusively between each other without mixing with the Dutch in the neighouring islands.

skill could not touch, while to-day it is able to snatch from death many of these poor creatures whom he has already three-quarters mutilated. (1)

There are thus legions of unfortunate beings, who while forming an extraordinarily instructive study for mankind, have a right to collective help. Such collective assistance is bound to be rendered, as I have already said in other words, with our new facilities for rapid intercommunication, and the sense of our responsibilities toward our neighbour which is steadily on the increase. It may also be increased by the regular interchanges of views between all the institutions for the treatment of such cases. We need not fear that the comparison of results obtained in the different houses of "miracle" will result in the adoption of a uniform education (such as Dr. Sangrado's) which ignores the profound difference between one case and another. On the contrary, it will confirm the necessity for assimilating the best of the rules for physical and moral culture, and for altering them to the conditions

(1) This is, perhaps, the reason of the relatively large numbers of blind and deaf mutes in the United States, where medical men never consider the condition of a patient beyond hope, and who defy, up to the end, the worst form of complications. Moreover, it is important to recognise that the cases of blind and deaf mutes must be more numerous than statistics show, as many families systematically hide the truth about these afflictions.

of the various subjects of treatment, as we vary the seed according to the climate and quality of the soil. From this springs the justification of the different systems applied in one case to Laura Bridgman, in another to Helen Keller, and then again to Marie or Marthe Heurtin.

* * *

Another fact—a little humiliating for our old Europe—is evident from this universal work. We shall see the pecuniary inferiority of our society—compared with that of the United States—for reconstituting these wrecks of individuals into happy and active living beings. Many aspects of the tumultuous civilisation of America are tarnished in our eyes by the excess of practical pre-occupation and the vulgar theatrical attitudes which accompany them. But we must do justice to Washington's posterity for their philanthropic munificence, which covers ours with shame, even if we take into consideration the disproportion of wealth between the New World and the Old, on account of the disproportion of respective military charges and other causes. Even if a grain of vanity is at the bottom of the generous gifts of so many rich men beyond the Atlantic, what

matter? They produce no less rich a harvest of good.

In America there is a great rivalry for the title of Mæcenas. To give money, accumulated in industry or finance, to help the poor and ignorant has lately become a habit, while it promises to become a tradition. Dollars fall like rain into the hands of those who help the afflicted to regain their footing on the ladder of the world. So much so, that when we meet, as I have met, French teachers of the deaf and dumb, or blind, and mention the wonders accomplished in their profession on the banks of the Charles river, or the Hudson, one always hears the plaintive remark: "They are so rich over there, and they give so much! Suffering is accustomed to hide its false modesty and to cry aloud for charity—and charity is so contagious that the country is a field of rivalry, where each races to be the first to do good. Ah, if only our habits did not limit our means of action so miserably!"

This is the sad parallel which we draw, in comparing what is done in America with what is done in Europe, for the miseries that nature inflicts on individuals. While encouraging each nation to borrow from others the special educational methods suited to this or that

case, this international enquiry will, no doubt, awaken at the same time a salutary remorse amongst all, whether public societies or wealthy individuals, who might so easily help the operations of "human Providence" and who at present hold back.

True, intimate and sincere compassion is, without doubt, a virtue as much with us as with the people of any other latitude. But in Europe there are as many rich men with a false sense of shame, as there are poor. Not merely is almsgiving practised with discretion on account of the counsel of Christ as to the right hand and the left—but, often, it is not practised at all, from fear of the ridicule attaching to every kind of display of pity or sentiment, in a society anxious to assume an air of cynical scepticism, and afraid of being despised for sentimental weakness.

But it is an attitude which will change, if encouraged to do so, since it is only a conventional mask that hides a nature fundamentally different.

CHAPTER VII

From the Crow's Nest

THE LIMITS OF THE PRESENT STUDY. LESSONS IN ALTRUISM AND FORESIGHT. MAN'S RIGHTS AND MAN'S DUTY. THE SYMBOL OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE HELEN KELLERS AND MARIE HEURTINS. THE TRIPLY AFFLICTED AND THE SYSTEMS OF M.M. BERGSON AND SCHURÉ. GOD AND MAN. CONCLUSION.

The connection existing between all things and all causes strikes us each time that we begin to investigate any subject. And the study of what I have called "Man's Miracle," far from disproving the axiom of "tout est dans tout," confirms it more strongly. Have I sufficiently insisted, I wonder, in the preceding chapters, on the counsels it conveys of self-confidence, to whoever faces life in a position of serious inferiority? If not, I come back to the charge for a moment, and ask—What child born in a sordid hut, with eyes to see, and ears and tongue ready to hear, understand and express himself, could believe he was

infallibly condemned to perpetual material or moral misery, if at the age of mental adolescence he could compare himself with creatures born without any of the essential means of communication with their fellow creatures, and who have conquered these immense disadvantages? And when he had also seen these very shortcomings incite them to further effort, and to a greater success than the majority of persons highly favoured from their birth, may we not be sure that initial misfortune, can and ought to help, instead of hinder, their will, and energy? To say that a child, rich in fortune, honour and security, from his cradle, is handicapped by the simple results of heredity for life, because he has not the strength to overcome its disillusions, or that he is wearied by having his desires immediately and invariably satisfied, is a truism rather than a paradox. And yet, it is not useless to repeat again and again that the more unfortunate life is at the outset, the greater compensations are in store in the future, provided that there is a brave heart ready to struggle. A Helen Keller, whose early youth had been normal, would probably never have attained to the intellectual and moral heights she has climbed under the spur of

adversity. Her example ought to encourage us to seek for happiness in spite of our surroundings; that is, as the fruit of natural adversity, and not as the reward of exceptional advantages. It will convince us that in this world the first shall be last and the last first, although this may only come to us in the far-distant future.

Perhaps the proofs from the cases of Laura Bridgman and Helen Keller and Marie and Marthe Heurtin, may be considered insufficient to prove the unity of intelligence and consciousness. But in this case I admit my inability to express my convictions more powerfully than I have already done. It seems to me that all has been proved that was capable of proof when one has said this. Try to teach the most gifted animal on earth (man excepted) to write and to speak intelligently and intelligibly—no attempts up to the present have succeeded; but only make the same experiment on a child, a hundred times inferior to this animal, in that the most indispensable senses are absent, and you may hope to teach him the principal, or even all the things that human beings can be taught. This hope has been realized. Take a watch made this morning, but which has not been set going. If I can

wind it up and make the hands move, it is because the potentialities of motion were concealed under its inert and motionless face What other phenomenon than the pre-existence of an invisible mental spring will explain the setting in motion of intelligences, as paralysed and as incapable of motion as those of a child born into the world without the least *apparent* mechanism of perception and comprehension, except bodily contact with objects around? Let those who disagree prove their case if they can.

It is doubtful in any case whether they can refuse to blind and deaf mutes, with otherwise complete organisations, the position we claim for them as examples of evolution worthy of the best scientific research.

If a single bone was all that Cuvier needed to reconstruct a species, extinct or transformed in the course of ages, why should we despair of reconstructing the history of our prototype by observing the transformation of contemporary beings as meagrely endowed by nature at the outset of their existence as their prehistoric ancestors?

I leave to others the task of discovering the creator of the mental spring without which no one in

the world could convey to such beings the movements of thought. Whether it be the work of nature operating on humanity by gradual but infallible processes, which are still perhaps very far from their highest point of development, or else of some conscious and invisible force: that is a question on which I am not qualified to speak, whatever my intimate impressions on the subject. But there is no reason why others should not tread this great but adventurous path of exploration.

This study, which is not meant for such vast speculations, has no other object than to draw out of the shadow a few humble truths easy to demonstrate and more immediately essential, and to establish on a sounder basis some truths, often conjectured or foreseen, but never accepted as proved. Amongst the answers which it seems to give to a thousand pressing questions is perhaps the solution to this one: "Does our morality spring from ancient and artificial conventions which can be altered to-day, or from an infallible instinct which is essentially necessary and therefore immutable?"

When one climbs to the crow's nest to obtain a general view of the surroundings, does it not seem

evident that the precepts which, at the extreme horizon of our civilization, declared the conjugal union of near relations immoral, are absolutely in agreement with the higher interests of individuals and races?

A certain number of cases of blindness, of deafness and dumbness, or of all three afflictions, are no doubt pure accidents, without any relation to antecedents. The case of Helen Keller furnishes us with one proof, as also that of Marthe Obrecht, another inmate of Larnay [1] who lost her sight, her hearing and her speech at the age of three years, during the war of 1870, after a nervous convulsion caused by the cannonade, musketry, the sight of blood, and other terrifying manifestations of the war.

But, even more than alcoholism, marriage between persons of consanguinity remains one of the principal and persistent causes of these deformities. It is that, as we have seen, which is the source of a vitiated blood and poisoned life. And it is no narrow and

(1) Also the case of Anne Marie Poyet, born of healthy parents in 1894, who became blind, deaf and dumb at 15 months, after an accidental and very serious illness. She was sent to the Institute at Larnay, where she gives promise of good results. Also the case of Alexis Decramer, a blind, deaf and dumb inmate of the Institute at Bruges, who is mentioned in another part of this book.

absurd prejudice which condemns incest in its higher and lower degrees, but an intuition, conscious or unconscious, of the fatal degeneration which follows. This intuition does not date from Christianity, for in the heartrending tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles the *Eumenides* intervene to punish severely the passion of Phædra for her son, and the guilty though unconscious union between Œdipus and his mother. Still, Christianity,[1] even while admitting the union of a brother and sister to be at the base of their creation—as failing that, the posterity of the first human couple would have become immediately extinct—has forbidden marriages between near relations with the utmost rigour in the name of a moral ideal, which simply gives expression to the most elementary physiological laws, and is in every case in happy agreement with them.

Perhaps one might find at the root of every article of our moral code, ecclesiastical or political, a similar

(1) The term "Christianity" does not apply here, exclusively to the Catholic religion, but to all categories of modern religions. Protestantism, for example, is still more severe than Rome against consanguinity, or conjugal affinity, to such an extent that English law prohibited, up to a few years ago, the marriage of a widower with his sister-in-law, and the law was only repealed after a century of controversy in Parliament.

explanation of its utility, of an alliance of practical interest with a virtuous ideal. The origin of the greater part of our infirmities shows that the morality which forbids the union of relations does not merely concern the health of the soul, but also that of the body. This fact once established, the culture of the moral sense becomes much simpler. For beyond the counsels of wisdom and goodness which conscience gives us, there are others, to which we more readily listen, dictated by our positive interest. If we awaken this interest and show that it goes hand in hand with the intimate satisfaction which comes from rectitude and purity of conduct, our exhortations will have an infinitely greater chance of being heard. English moralists take this point of view in such maxims as "Honesty is the best policy." The churches themselves rely on the egotistic and self-interested motives of men in holding out as an inducement to good, and as a deterrent from evil, the prospect of infinite reward, or eternal expiation? The sanctions, however, which they preach, obtain less and less hold of the imagination. They are too distant and problematic. When we have made it clear to all, that faults or errors, without speaking of crime, must be paid for dearly, inexorably,

and at no distance of time, we shall have replaced a religious morality, which is losing its hold on humanity, by another more efficacious, though there will always remain a class of persons that reason can never hope to reach.

To show that this is no mere dream, let us consider a direct proof to the contrary from one of the cases before us.

The cousins who married and had nine girls and boys, seven of whom were terribly abnormal, were decent people who erred in pure ignorance of the consequences of their union. One may be sure that if they had been enlightened beforehand as to the misfortunes that might arise, they would have resisted the attraction they obeyed. Especially as they, themselves, were doomed to suffer as much, or more, than the victims themselves.

One can imagine the humiliation and anguish of the parents who give birth to such miserable beings. In the greater number of these occurrences the reparation of the evil becomes a new source of torture for the unhappy parents. The blind and deaf mute, brought back to consciousness and active life by long and heroic efforts, often does not know his own

mother. In the case of Laura Bridgman, and others, there have been agonising scenes between the parents, who vainly hold out their arms, and the children, now free, who take them for strangers and turn away. The most sacred tie of nature is more or less completely broken.

The child has now—at least, in his heart—no other mother than the indefatigable and devoted author of his spiritual being. The mother who bore him realises the awful penalty she must pay for her transgression of those laws of nature of which she was ignorant, though the simple thought of such a possible torture would have prevented such a transgression eight times out of ten. I know that science still hesitates to use definitely the word "transgression" in such cases. A school of physiologists maintains that the union of near relations produces, in certain cases, an improvement instead of a deterioration of the race. But cases such as those we are considering would seem rather to tend to militate against this last theory, or may serve, at least, as an argument against unions which appear, in principle, so full of misery for parents and children alike.

For all men and all women capable of any feeling

of charity, new rules of conduct might be laid down with the intent to awaken in them an interest outside of themselves or the immediate moment. The light that science in the present day has thrown on the hereditary nature of taints, will authorise a further development of our recent methods of puericulture. One already hears whispers of pre natal and ante natal culture, in the sense of a better individual discipline, for the benefit of the future as well as for the present. If these theories were converted into rules of life they would work marvels. Old proverbs worn-out, yet still teeming with significance have repeated from age to age that the boy is father of the man. The immense majority of people only date their responsibility towards their descendants, from a child's birth. They lose sight of the endless chain which binds each generation and each step, to the generations and steps going before and coming after them.

* * *

Many of those who repeat the classical cry of egoism, "After me, the deluge," mean "After me—and my kin." But even these, think they have fully paid their debts to their posterity when they have

secured for them, for a time, shelter and food. The evidence, each day more overwhelming, of hereditary degeneration, will sanction the revelation to a future parent of the fatal influence which a fault of youth, a folly of the twenties, the careless fancy of a day, may have on the character, health, physique and moral destiny of a whole generation after him, which no legacy or fortune, however large, will be able to remedy. Dramatic works such as Ibsen's "Ghosts," or Brieux' "Les Avariés," have done much to make many young brains think, and thus have preserved others in the future from a fearsome heritage. But although efficacious, the result of this teaching by the theatre is small and fleeting. It must be generalised and prolonged by a systematic and permanent propaganda, enumerating the grave and far-reaching consequences which excess of all kinds and marriage between cousins [1] may have for the future. It belongs to France, which has erected the brilliant lighthouse of the

[1] Or marriage between old people and young. The great and unhappy Baudelaire was such a victim, as he says: "I inherit an execrable temperament from my parents. I am torn to pieces on account of them. This is what it is to be the child of a mother of 27 and a father of 62." (*Conversations of Baudelaire with M. Georges Barral*).

Declaration of the Rights of Man, to formulate with the same precision (at least in the educational sphere) the Declaration of the Duties of Man first towards himself, and afterwards to his posterity, which is menaced as much, or more, than he is, by his weakness, his ignorance, or his want of forethought.

To a nation which has formulated the rights of the individual in such a clear and definite manner, this mission of imprinting on man's conscience the fact that the first of his duties is to deserve his rights, legitimately belongs. Many people may smile at such an attempt to purify an age which makes a cynical show of impurity. But an age, which believes and calls itself so perverse, contradicts itself. This very mania, as old as civilisation, for professing a bad opinion of the times and declaring its decadence, seems to betray some noble regret for not being better, and a longing for perfection, as far as that is humanly possible.

Certainly no one will deny, that as societies advance in age, they lose, as do individuals, something of their early simplicity. It is perhaps a special characteristic of our age, to affect in regard

to moral laws, a much-vaunted indifference which is contradicted by a thousand daily noble actions and aspirations towards good. The visibly growing intensity of the struggle for life forces many to adopt the attitude of eager gamblers or fierce combatants, who will stop at nothing. To avoid being treated as ready dupes of worn-out scruples, or for fear of appearing old fashioned, we put on a semblance of depravity and try to hide any praiseworthy and natural sentiment that we feel, as rich women hide the glories of their real hair with false, or, like lilies in our gardens which, blushing to be taken for lilies, desire to pass in their borrowed crimson for what M. Henri Lavedan denounces in his *Goût du vice* as "la rose qui pue."

It seems, also, for the moment, as if music itself had renounced all charm, and had become laborious and coldly expressive of truths from which it has previously served as a refuge; as if poetry had left the clouds where she had lingered too long, to skim over the earth, or hover above factory chimneys and aviation sheds; as if the cultivation of muscle must come before that of brain, and sport before art; that dancing must no longer be a gracious and lovely

movement, but a realistic imitation of the whirl of a machine, or resemble an indecent turn at a music hall; as if the passion of love, sentimentalised by our fond grandparents, must give place, in the theatre and perhaps in life, to the primitive desire for sensual satisfaction. For fear of being taken for a relic of the age of swords and ruffles, we have not the courage to appear honest and fastidious, and prefer to meet every example of idealism with the croak of the frogs who scoffed at the enthusiastic crowing of Chanticleer. And this is particularly apparent at the centre of civilisation, towards which all ears are turned to catch the word of command.

* * *

No doubt, all these signs of psychic fatigue, of disenchantment, or spiritual decay, would be dangerous if they endured, or if they were not merely the confused prelude to some moral revival. For if we persist in any attitude for long enough, we end by remaining there altogether. But a view of the progress of humanity suggests the hope that these are only the symptoms of an ephemeral fashion. It is true that a gifted observer wrote recently that our

century "is a new era, which has separated itself from its antecedents, and detached from the rest of history, is going towards the unknown." But this can only be said or thought with certainty of the mere surface. This apparent break with the past holds good only of scientific discovery, which has suddenly opened to us so many means of locomotion, of communication, of sources of energy and light, of instruments for investigation and conquest, unknown, although confusedly foreseen, by past generations. But the human soul has not changed so far as to become unrecognisable, even if our age has made such a rapid and measureless advance in physics. The discovery of the radiograph, or the creation of the aeroplane, has not broken the thread which from all time has bound our psychic being to the past. Our existence is a hundred times better equipped materially than it ever has been, for the satisfaction of our immediate and practical needs. Because the machinery of the world has made an enormous bound into space, must one believe that our moral nature has made or will make, an equal step backwards, and put an immeasurable distance between the body and the soul? On the

contrary, does not reason tell us that humanity, when it recovers from the astonishment and intoxication caused by its sudden and unexpected material progress, will become morally better, saner, and more generous in proportion as its conditions of life have made it richer in feeling, better equipped in knowledge, and more ready to receive the beautiful and the good?

Of such progress the history of these blind and deaf mutes, so pitifully handicapped at life's start, is symbolical. As science has enabled us to transmit the sound of our voices to enormous distances, to telegraph over the seas, or to travel from one end of the world to another in less time than it took, a quarter of a century ago, to traverse a quarter of Europe, so they have been magically provided with a new power of perception and receptivity. The Helen Kellers, the Marie Heurtins, and, in a less degree, all the blind and deaf mutes in the world were, at the beginning of their lives, only animals. The result of their wonderful education has been to lead them nearer to idealism, not to estrange them from it. What right then have we to be pessimistic, to be so certain of our moral

degeneration, when we see the actual advance that social evolution has made, which has led society, once as undeveloped as were they in their infancy, to a state of development as high and as complete as is theirs to-day. But if, as it happens, we are passing through a period of transition in the sphere of morality, the example of these poor creatures, who have been rescued from the darkness in which they lay, should help to give us confidence in the future.

One of the many symptoms of the persistence of the moral ideal is the duel which is being fought between those who are roughly styled *militarists* and *pacifists*. The two camps obey—perhaps confusedly, but fatally—two equally high ideals. On the side of peace is the revolt, not only against the fatal risks which in the past have cost so many millions of young lives, altering the natural course of their destiny, but also against the immoral principle of hatred and antagonism between races and people. On the other side—for no one dares defend war simply as a barbarous sport—is a revolt against the idea that would hold existence higher than honour, dignity or justice, and sacrifice the

interest of a whole people, or of a country, to our individual cravings for peace and enjoyment. I am not one of those fanatics who think that "peace at any price" represents a desirable object, or that "war at any price" can be justified. But I know that if I were an anti-militarist I should quote cases such as the deaf and dumb, the blind, and other victims of nature, and preach that all the activities, all the sacrifices, all the aspirations that go to the fight for victory can find something to satisfy them in the battle with the eternal coalition of blind forces that surround human nature and the thirst for happiness. Again, I may perhaps be allowed to repeat that the very acuteness of the struggle that rages round the question of peace and war, and the limits and latitude to be allowed to the question respectively by the interests of each collective human group, viewed as a corporate unit, and the general desire for universal brotherhood, is in itself a witness to the moral preoccupation of an age which is, on the surface, so anxious to advertise a sneering scepticism and a sensualist outlook on life.

If, however, we are assured that our age is like a ship going adrift, it is, doubtless, not without some

reason. Such words express the uneasiness of many minds as to how conscience will steer without the compass furnished by a vanishing religion. Listen to the philosopher who has written on "Our Moral Uneasiness."[1] Although imbued with mysticism, he makes no fetish of this spiritual compass, since he observes that in the middle ages "vice and crime were at least as common as they are now," that "life was incomparably more cruel and unjust." But, while maintaining that it was not religion that created the ideal, but that it is the ideal that created religion, he asks how we are to fill the void left by faith, in imaginations which looked upon it as the counsellor of one's conscience. It is, doubtless, these contemporary doubts that an acute thinker like M. Bergson is answering when he tells us not to listen to reason, or geometrical argument, those incompetent explorers of the immaterial unknown, but to trust to instinct to reveal where logic fails. The same desire to replace, cost what it may, the religions that are discredited, or on the way to be so, led another writer, the author of the *Grands Initiés* and *l'Evolution divine*, to found a new

1 Maurice Maeterlinck, *L'Intelligence des Fleurs.*

religion of lofty and fantastic design on the ancient creeds, in which, with all the fascination of a warmly romantic imagination, he at once revives the old secrets of the esoteric philosophy and embraces the evolution of Christianity and its future in all their vast scope. A more concrete example of the anxieties of the modern mind in search of some faith is offered by the career of Mrs. Annie Besant, the great priestess of Theosophy. She was first married to a Protestant clergyman whose hard and narrow bigotry disgusted her with Christianity, and she became the fervent disciple of Charles Bradlaugh, the English advocate of Atheism. Then, troubled by the emptiness of simple negation, she caught desperately at the plank of Indian mysticism, and returned to a faith, such as it was, by another and very ancient road.

* * *

I do not pretend to say here what encouragement, or causes for alteration, the recent systems that profess to explain the origin and future of life may find in the startling phenomenon of the evolution of the blind and deaf mutes. Perhaps, Henri Bergson might find in these a new proof of the superiority of intuition over logical faculties, although we have not

seen that instinct by itself led our triply afflicted friends to the idea of Divinity.[1] Would M. Edouard Schuré have offered Laura Bridgman and Helen Keller to Darwin and his followers as living proofs of his theory of an old and degraded ancestor without eyes or ears, whom he himself assigned to them as progenitor, and shows us as developing, little by little, through actual human form, to the grandeur of the archangels? The answer to these two points would be extremely interesting, but it could only be made by those to whom the question is put.

But, if one confines oneself to patent undeniable facts, as is my wish, one must first recognise that the presence in our race of a spiritual root, that is, of a power lit from within, is clearly shown by the cases studied in these pages, and secondly, that these same cases teach us courage, confidence in ourselves and the high dignity of our condition, whatever conjectures may be made as to the source of our mind and its ultimate destiny. Not that these conjectures are useless, and that it is better to rest

(1) As a fact, they were led to it, as we have seen, by education, and the elementary reasoning which logic suggested. "Nothing is made by itself. Therefore someone invisible has made the earth, the flowers, the stars." But it is evidently possible that this atavistic reasoning was originally dictated by instinct.

content with the ignorance advocated by agnostics. The human race would lose one of its chief and most glorious characteristics the day that it put aside the most magnificent of its cares, and became indifferent, as doubtless mere animals are indifferent, to knowing whence it came and whither it is going. Again, the transformation that humanity accomplishes in these triply afflicted persons, strengthens the conviction that everything is possible to its genius and its daring, even to the penetration of the enigmas which transcend the gulfs of the past and future. But we must realise that up till now the noblest of our problems has not been solved in any manner approximately certain, or definitely convincing. Perhaps the great mysteries have been touched, or soon will be, by science, or by the subconsciousness of each individual. But will the knowledge which may come in this century, or in ten or twenty centuries, obtain the almost unanimous assent without which it will never serve to govern the general conduct of society? However actively the field of theory be excavated and the thousand parasitical superstitions be got rid of, it will probably be long before some truth is unearthed from the depths beneath convincing enough

to be universally accepted. Life will probably continue to appear to the majority of men as an intelligible moment between the unintelligible infinities of the past and future. This moment must remain the one solid foundation for knowledge until a new order of things arises; therefore, is it not natural and necessary to prolong it as far as we can, and cling to it, rather than to the vague fog from which it emerges and to which it recedes? Can one, in good faith, expect the majority of human beings to neglect the immediate and the certain for the problematic and the distant, about which we are all so slow to agree? As long as occult truths are kept from the greater number of eyes, we must take our stand on tangible facts, and adapt ourselves to them, as did the first sailors in navigating unknown seas, or as do Arctic explorers of to-day imprisoned in ice floes. And if we are told that the consideration of life as a self-contained and finite entity must produce demoralisation and evil, we can show that advice is only an interested sophism, or a mistaken prejudice.

The loss of belief in Divinity, whether total and definite, or simply partial and temporary, seems

to dictate to us duties with which faith dispenses when it authorises us to delegate our responsibilities. First of all it must destroy the traditional excuse provided for egoism by the convenient axiom: "Each for himself and God for all." And it will incite all to help the societies which, rightly or wrongly, do not rely on the intervention of a third and omnipotent power for the common defence against the dangers of life. Though the denial of a Supernatural Providence be a heresy, a sacrilege, yet the more it is affirmed, the more evident it becomes, that a human Providence is necessary, such as that which has made existence more than tolerable for the afflicted and infirm. Add the greater energy and initiative which is instilled into an orphan by the conviction of being isolated, abandoned, and reduced to rely only on his own resources, and we have the moral condition of our race, which has come to think itself orphaned because of the absence of a Father it believed in. No doubt this prospect offers some dangers not quite imaginary; to incorrigibly unmoral people in whom the fear or hope, encouraged by religion, restrain indiscipline, it might suggest the reasoning which Dostoevsky puts into the mouth of a

Muscovite: "If there is nothing beyond life, then let us enjoy it by any means—everything is lawful." But one of the most remarkable symptoms of our evolution re-assures us by showing us that such a state of mind is only exceptional and fleeting. Before a part of modern consciousness had excluded Divinity from its vision or presentment, the greater number of consciences, even the humblest and the most prone to superstition, had effaced the cruel element from its divinity. One may say without contradiction that in France, for instance, there is hardly a peasant, even the firmest believer, who adheres to the idea of hell and of eternal punishment. That is, that there is an end to the sarcasm of Voltaire: "If God made man in his image, man has done the same for God." Even the greater number of those who remain faithful to the altar have profoundly changed the image of the tutelary being, placed there for their adoration. Instead of a God to be dreaded for his ferocious and exorbitant justice, they only see His almighty power, infinite goodness, and inexhaustible kindness and mercy. Here is the luminous indication of a new and beautiful morality which makes for progression, and not for retrogression. How can we better the models

held up to us if we do not better ourselves? The faith of the man who believed without discussion in a furiously vindictive Providence corresponded exactly with the barbarous nature of a society which practised on each other all the refinements of torture, and saw God in its own image. Each age has the gods it merits, and ours is One Whose face, though turned away from many of us, is for others the ideal of an age of veritable justice and real love.

Some may object that in softening so far the divine character we have only made away with an absurdity, apparent to our good sense, and have not been fighting against an atrocious conception condemned by our hearts. Nevertheless, why has the idea of a supreme and pitiless executioner become absurd to us, if not that we have become infinitely more just and charitable, and that our moral sense could no longer admit of a superior power less just and charitable than ourselves? Shall we not find, also, in spite of a few apparent instances to the contrary, the proof of our moral progression in the new modes of material organisation of our existence: for instance, in our marvellous systems of insurance and friendly societies? We are accustomed to see in such organisa-

tions only the simple combinations of foresight and practical wisdom. But behind them and their cold arithmetic shines the principle of moral altruism: "All for one—one for all." This new star is seen shining from the top of the crow's nest. Someone who had the temerity to proclaim the extinction of the old constellations, neglected to say that others would be lighted for the general good, for no world could bear in patience the darkening of the skies.

And our conclusion is this: Instead of a God who has vanished, or will vanish never to return, man will find another in himself. Believers and sceptics only differ on a question of prejudice. According to the first, our race, on the awakening of conscience, found their gods in a sublime *intuition* forced on it by reality. According to the others, they found them in an *invention* equally inspired, in the dream of grandeur, of beauty, of immortality, by which they desired to raise themselves above their elementary condition, that condition being too unhappy and uncertain for their needs. Whichever of these two versions we accept for want of a certainty, or while waiting for a decisive revelation, the results are the same. Man, whether creature, or creator, has grown incomparably

superior to all that is before and around him. One can hardly see anything to hinder his ascent to the highest physical level, still less to his moral ascent. Though we may be mistaken in this feeling of a personal force, independent of any outside power, it should, I think, serve to exalt our ambition to prove ourselves worthy. Royalty is more powerful when it is held sacred by its own claim, than when based on universal consent. Since man has fashioned a more perfect God in his own image during these last centuries, he has, by so doing, acquired for himself a sort of divinity on the way to perfection, from which everything may be expected, if it has not reached a point where further progress is impossible, or from which it must descend once more. Man must be as God, until some crushing evidence has convinced him of wild presumption. In this attainment his morality may lose, perhaps, the prestige of the melancholy poetry which the church instils by the severity of its teaching, its sad ideal, dominated by the crucifix and death; but, on the other hand, it will gain by drawing to it spirits eager for the joy of life, and for living in the sun—a sun very different from that of the pagans, extinguished at least by twenty centuries of

Christianity. In any case, we shall never find such a definitely persuasive proof of the greatness and the goodness of humanity as the re-creation of such poor outcasts of nature as these blind and deaf mutes. It is miracles such as these, whether actual or symbolic, which, ascribed to Christ, have brought generation after generation to Christianity. The restoration of sight to the blind, of the power of movement to the paralytic, have so impressed our feelings, that for a long series of centuries they have been open to dogmas which they have explained and justified.

Man's Miracle, which has been so specially and brilliantly exemplified in such beings as Helen Keller and Marie Heurtin, seems to have been accomplished for the purpose of inspiring in them the same faith in themselves, and of guiding the virtues which it betrays towards higher duties and more complete realisation.

In a fine book (that of M. Arnould, to which I have made many allusions, and from it borrowed many details of facts, while differing from his conclusions), regret is expressed that Marie Heurtin, the product of one of these miracles, draws far fewer people to the old capital of Poitou than a beautiful and antique

Monsieur,

Votre bonne visite nous
a laissé bien agréable
souvenir et nous prou-
ve que votre bonté
[illegible]
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que dans quelques jours.
lorsqu'ils seront de re-
tour nous y retournerons
et, peut-être, serons-

TO FACE PAGE 196

nous plus heureuses et aurons nous le plaisir de les toucher et de les examiner. je vous écrirai alors, monsieur, et je vous dirai mes impressions sur les échantillons dont vous désirez avoir, monsieur, notre réponse. Veuillez agréer, monsieur, notre respect et veuillez présenter à madame Murry nos respectueuses salutations. -

marie beurlin
martine beurlin.

notre-dame de lourdes, le 23 septembre 1912.

monsieur,

votre bonne visite nous
a laissé bien agréable
souvenir. nous avons
été ravis par votre bonté
et votre amabilité.
[illegible]
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que dans quelques jours.
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TO FACE PAGE 196

nous plus heureuses et
aurons-nous le plaisir de
les toucher et de les
examiner. je vous écrirai
alors, monsieur, et je
vous dirai mes impres-
sions sur les étoffes
dont vous me parlez, mon-
sieur, notre cœur est
tout respect et veuillez
présenter à madame
barry nos respectueuses
salutations. -

marie bourth,
marthe bourth.

notre-dame de lorette,
le 22 septembre 1862.

statue of Pallas Athene, excavated ten years ago in a local garden. The truth is that we ought to contemplate in turn this virgin in stone, and the marvels in flesh and blood of Larnay and Wrentham Cottage. They are sisters in origin. All three have sprung armed, from the brain of the same father, who was called Jupiter in ancient times, and whose name men have the right to take to-day.

For the work of our own hands is simply foretold by the allegories of our fables and marble statues, and those Olympian marvels were only the forecasts of our own.

APPENDIX

Text of the letter partially reproduced here, in Ballu characters.

MONSIEUR,

Your kind visit has left a very pleasant memory, and we shall not forget your goodness and amiability.

Yesterday our mistress took us to the aerodrome so that we might touch the aeroplanes—but, unfortunately, they had gone away the week before and will not return for a few days. When they come back we shall go again, and perhaps be more fortunate, and may have the pleasure of touching and examining them. I will write to you again, and tell you my impressions of the aeroplanes.

Please accept, Monsieur, our respectful gratitude, and kindly remember us to Madame Harry.

MARIE HEURTIN
MARTHE HEURTIN

Notre-Dame de Larnay,
September 23, 1912.

Letter from Canon P. A. NAEGHELS, director of the Institute for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind at Bruges, on the case of ALEXIS DECRAMER

MONSIEUR,

Our blind and deaf mute, Alexis Decramer, does not yet fulfil the hope we had of him. He came to us at the age of seven, in a purely animal condition. Up to his twelfth year (*i.e.*, till 1909) he had acquired a knowledge of words for current ideas, and a few general ideas (for example, those of idleness, industry, intelligence, stupidity), but he rebels against the least manual work, and is extremely gluttonous.

He sleeps to excess, and he has no control over terrible fits of temper when the satisfaction of his instincts is thwarted. He is very strong and muscular, and the blows he gives, leave their traces for weeks.

He can find his way about alone, where he is accustomed to go. But if a closed door or window stops him, he will demolish them like straws. His rages also break out whenever a lesson seems too long.

You can understand how difficult it is to teach this poor creature. But we do not despair of better results in the future.

He seems to have an idea of God, without knowing His name, by the sign that deaf mutes have taught him (the sign of Jesus Christ: the hands folded, the middle finger of one in the palm of the other, and *vice versa*). He is quiet in church. He can recite the "Hail Mary!" which he knows on his fingers. But can he understand words and phrases of religious ideas? Cardinal Bourne said to me, when he saw him, "We do not know what takes place in these souls."

Alexis Decramer never begins a conversation himself, even by signs. This state of mind does not satisfy me.

Otherwise, he is good, walks in the garden with one or other of the pupils who can be trusted, and replies to any question these may ask him by signs or gestures. He is happy when he is told that anyone has sweetmeats to give him; he tries to seize these and eat them, even if his hands are held, to restrain his greediness. He was born deaf and dumb, but not blind. At the age of five months, after an attack of scarlatina, he was discovered to suffer from ophthalmia, without altogether having lost his sight. His mother exposed his eyes to the sun; the disease became worse, and blindness followed. His mother, after taking care of him with the greatest devotion up to his fourth year, died of grief at the poor child's infirmity, which from ignorance she had partly caused. After his mother's death, little Alexis was more neglected, and finally left to himself; he acquired bad habits, such as crawling like an animal on the ground, and hanging on to the feet and legs of any one he met—a habit which returns to him now, if he sees a strange person. He has a strong constitution, and his health would be perfect if he did not spoil it by over-eating. He does not seem to be the victim of any hereditary taint; he has a brother who is perfectly normal. His father, an honest and sober workman, is employed at the sugar factory at——.

(Father) CANON P. M. NAEGHELS.

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